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First edition



SORDELLO.



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# SORDELLO.

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# SORDELLO.

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## BOOK THE FIRST.

Who will, may hear Sordello's story told :  
His story ? Who believes me shall behold  
The man, pursue his fortunes to the end  
Like me ; for as the friendless people's friend  
Spied from his hill-top once, despite the din  
And dust of multitudes, Pentapolin  
Named o' the Naked Arm, I single out  
Sordello, compassed murkily about  
With ravage of six long sad hundred years :  
Only believe me. Ye believe ?

Appears

Verona . . . Never, I should warn you first,  
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst

Yet not the best expedient, served to tell  
A story I could body forth so well  
By making speak, myself kept out of view,  
The very man as he was wont to do,  
And leaving you to say the rest for him :  
Since, though I might be proud to see the dim  
Abysmal Past divide its hateful surge,  
Letting of all men this one man emerge  
Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,  
I should delight in watching first to last  
His progress as you watch it, not a whit  
More in the secret than yourselves who sit  
Fresh-chapleted to listen : but it seems  
Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,  
Makers of quite new men, producing them  
Had best chalk broadly on each vesture's hem  
The wearer's quality, or take his stand  
Motley on back and pointing-pole in hand  
Beside them ; so for once I face ye, friends,  
Summoned together from the world's four ends,  
Dropped down from Heaven or cast up from Hell,  
To hear the story I propose to tell.  
Confess now, poets know the dragnet's trick,  
Catching the dead if Fate denies the quick

And shaming her ; 'tis not for Fate to choose  
Silence or song because she can refuse  
Real eyes to glisten more, real hearts to ache  
Less oft, real brows turn smoother for our sake :  
I have experienced something of her spite ;  
But there's a realm wherein she has no right  
And I have many lovers : say but few  
Friends Fate accords me ? Here they are ; now view  
The host I muster ! Many a lighted face  
Foul with no vestige of the grave's disgrace ;  
What else should tempt them back to taste our air  
Except to see how their successors fare ?  
My audience : and they sit, each ghostly man  
Striving to look as living as he can,  
Brother by breathing brother ; thou art set,  
Clear-witted critic, by . . . but I'll not fret  
A wondrous soul of them, nor move Death's spleen  
Who loves not to unlock them. Friends ! I mean  
The living in good earnest—ye elect  
Chiefly for love—suppose not I reject  
Judicious praise, who contrary shall peep  
Some fit occasion forth, for fear ye sleep,  
To glean your bland approvals. Then, appear,  
Verona ! stay—thou, spirit, come not near



Now—nor this time desert thy cloudy place  
To scare me, thus employed, with that pure face !  
I need not fear this audience, I make free  
With them, but then this is no place for thee !  
The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown  
Up out of memories of Marathon,  
Would echo like his own sword's griding screech  
Braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech  
Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,  
Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in  
The knights to tilt—wert thou to hear ! What hear  
Have I to play my puppets, bear my part  
Before these worthies ?

Lo, the Past is hurled

In twain : upthrust, out-staggering on the world,  
Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears  
Its outline, kindles at the core, appears  
Verona. 'Tis six hundred years and more  
Since an event. The Second Friedrich wore  
The purple, and the Third Honorius filled  
The holy chair. That autumn eve was stilled :  
A last remains of sunset dimly burned  
O'er the far forests like a torch-flame turned  
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand  
In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand

The woods beneath lay black. A single eye  
From all Verona cared for the soft sky :  
But, gathering in its ancient market-place,  
Talked group with restless group ; and not a face  
But wrath made livid, for among them were  
Death's staunch purveyors, such as have in care  
To feast him. Fear had long since taken root  
In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,  
The ripe hate, like a wine : to note the way  
It worked while each grew drunk ! men grave and grey  
Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,  
Letting the silent luxury trickle slow  
About the hollows where a heart should be ;  
But the young gulped with a delirious glee  
Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood  
At the fierce news : for, be it understood,  
Envoys apprised Verona that her prince  
Count Richard of Saint Boniface, joined since  
A year with Azzo, Este's Lord, to thrust  
Taurello Salinguerra, prime in trust  
With Ecelin Romano, from his seat  
Ferrara,—over zealous in the feat  
And stumbling on a peril unaware,  
Was captive, "trammelled in his proper snare,"

They phrase it, "taken by his own intrigue :"  
Immediate succour, from the Lombard League  
Of fifteen cities that affect the Pope,  
For Azzo therefore and his fellow—hope  
Of the Guelf cause, a glory overcast !  
Men's faces, late agape, are now aghast :  
Prone is the purple pavice ; Este makes  
Mirth for the Devil when he undertakes  
To play the Ecelin ; as if it cost  
Merely your pushing-by to gain a post  
Like his ! The patron tells ye, once for all,  
There be sound reasons that preferment fall  
On our beloved . . .

Duke o' the Rood, why not ?  
Shouted an Estian, grudge ye such a lot ?  
The hill-cat boasts some cunning of her own,  
Some stealthy trick to better beasts unknown  
That quick with prey enough her hunger blunts  
And feeds her fat while gaunt the lion hunts.

Taurello, quoth an envoy, as in wane  
Dwelt at Ferrara. Like an osprey fain  
To fly but forced the earth his couch to make  
Far inland till his friend the tempest wake,  
Waits he the Kaiser's coming ; and as yet  
That fast friend sleeps, and he too sleeps ; but let

Only the billow freshen, and he snuffs  
The aroused hurricane ere it enroughs  
The sea it means to cross because of him :  
Sinketh the breeze ? His hope-sick eye grows dim ;  
Creep closer on the creature ! Every day  
Strengthens the Pontiff ; Ecelin, they say,  
Dozes at Oliero, with dry lips  
Telling upon his perished finger-tips  
How many ancestors are to depose  
Ere he be Satan's Viceroy when the doze  
Deposits him in hell ; so Guelfs rebuilt  
Their houses ; not a drop of blood was spilt  
When Cino Bocchimpane chanced to meet  
Buccio Virtù ; God's wafer, and the street  
Is narrow ! Tutti Santi, think, a-swarm  
With Ghibellins, and yet he took no harm.  
This could not last. Off Salinguerra went  
To Padua, Podestà, with pure intent,  
Said he, my presence, judged the single bar  
To permanent tranquillity, may jar  
No longer—so ! his back is fairly turned ?  
The pair of goodly palaces are burned,  
The gardens ravaged, and your Guelf is drunk  
A week with joy ; the next, his laughter sunk

In sobs of blood, for he found, some strange way,  
Old Salinguerra back again ; I say  
Old Salinguerra in the town once more  
Uprooting, overturning, flame before  
Blood fetlock-high beneath him ; Azzo fled ;  
Who scaped the carnage followed ; then the dead  
Were pushed aside from Salinguerra's throne,  
He ruled once more Ferrara, all alone,  
Till Azzo, stunned awhile, revived, would pounce  
Coupled with Boniface, like lynx and ounce,  
On the gorged bird. The burghers ground their teeth  
To see troop after troop encamp beneath  
I' the standing corn thick o'er the scanty patch  
It took so many patient months to snatch  
Out of the marsh ; while just within their walls  
Men fed on men. Astute Taurello calls  
A parley : let the Count wind up the war !  
Richard, light-hearted as a plunging star,  
Agrees to enter for the kindest ends  
Ferrara, flanked with fifty chosen friends,  
No horse-boy more for fear your timid sort  
Should fly Ferrara at the bare report.  
Quietly through the town they rode, jog-jog ;  
Ten, twenty, thirty . . . curse the catalogue

Of burnt Guelf houses ! Strange Taurello shows  
Not the least sign of life—whereat arose  
A general growl : How ? With his victors by ?  
I and my Veronese ? My troops and I ?  
Receive us, was your word ? so jogged they on,  
Nor laughed their host too openly : once gone  
Into the trap . . .

Six hundred years ago !

Such the time's aspect and peculiar woe  
(Yourselves may spell it yet in chronicles,  
Albeit the worm, our busy brother, drills  
His sprawling path through letters anciently  
Made fine and large to suit some abbot's eye)  
When the new Hohenstauffen dropped the mask,  
Flung John of Brienne's favor from his casque,  
Forswore crusading, had no mind to leave  
Saint Peter's proxy leisure to retrieve  
Losses to Otho and to Barbaross,  
Or make the Alps less easy to recross ;  
And thus confirming Pope Honorius' fear,  
Was excommunicate that very year.  
The triple-bearded Teuton come to life !  
Groaned the Great League ; and, arming for the strife,  
Wide Lombardy, on tiptoe to begin,  
Took up, as it was Guelf or Ghibellin,



Its cry; what cry?

The Emperor to come!

His crowd of feudatories, all and some  
That leapt down with a crash of swords, spears, shields,  
One fighter on his fellow, to our fields,  
Scattered anon, took station here and there,  
And carried it, till now, with little care—  
Cannot but cry for him; how else rebut  
Us longer? Cliffs an earthquake suffered jut  
In the mid-sea, each domineering crest  
Nothing save such another throe can wrest  
From out (conceive) a certain chokeweed grown  
Since o'er the waters, twine and tangle thrown  
Too thick, too fast accumulating round,  
Too sure to over-riot and confound  
Ere long each brilliant islet with itself  
Unless a second shock save shoal and shelf,  
Whirling the sea-drift wide: alas, the bruised  
And sullen wreck! Sunlight to be diffused  
For that! Sunlight, 'neath which, a scum at first,  
The million fibres of our chokeweed nurst  
Dispread themselves, mantling the troubled main,  
And, shattered by those rocks, took hold again  
So kindly blazed it—that same blaze to brood  
O'er every cluster of the multitude



Still hazarding new clasps, ties, filaments,  
An emulous exchange of pulses, vents  
Of nature into nature ; till some growth  
Unfancied yet exuberantly clothe  
A surface solid now, continuous, one :  
The Pope, for us the People, who begun  
The People, carries on the People thus,  
To keep that Kaiser off and dwell with us !  
See you ?

Or say, Two Principles that live  
Each fitly by its Representative :  
Hill-cat . . . who called him so, our gracefulest  
Adventurer ? the ambiguous stranger-guest  
Of Lombardy (sleek but that ruffling fur,  
Those talons to their sheath !) whose velvet purr  
Soothes jealous neighbours when a Saxon scout  
. . . Arpo or Yoland, is it ? one without  
A country or a name, presumes to couch  
Beside their noblest ; until men avouch  
That of all Houses in the Trivisan  
Conrad describes no fitter, rear or van,  
Than Eccelo ! They laughed as they enrolled  
That name at Milan on the page of gold  
For Godego, Ramon, Marostica,  
Cartiglion, Bassano, Loria,

And every sheep-cote on the Suabian's fief !  
No laughter when his son, the Lombard Chief  
Forsooth, as Barbarossa's path was bent  
To Italy along the Vale of Trent,  
Welcomed him at Roncaglia ! Sadness now—  
The hamlets nested on the Tyrol's brow,  
The Asolan and Euganean hills,  
The Rhetian and the Julian, sadness fills  
Them all that Ecelin vouchsafes to stay  
Among and care about them ; day by day  
Choosing this pinnacle, the other spot,  
A castle building to defend a cot,  
A cot built for a castle to defend,  
Nothing but castles, castles, nor an end  
To boasts how mountain ridge may join with ridge  
By sunken gallery and soaring bridge—  
He takes, in brief, a figure that beseems  
The griesliest nightmare of the Church's dreams,  
A Signory firm-rooted, unestranged  
From its old interests, and nowise changed  
By its new neighbourhood ; perchance the vaunt  
Of Otho, " my own Este shall supplant  
Your Este," come to pass. The sire led in  
A son as cruel ; and this Ecelin

Had sons, in turn, and daughters sly and tall,  
And curling and compliant ; but for all  
Romano (so they style him) thrives, that neck  
Of his so pinched and white, that hungry cheek  
Prove 'tis some fiend, not him, men's flesh is meant  
To feed : whereas Romano's instrument,  
Famous Taurello Salinguerra, sole  
I' the world, a tree whose boughs are slipt the bole  
Successively, why shall not he shed blood  
To further a design ? Men understood  
Living was pleasant to him as he wore  
His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er,  
Propped on his truncheon in the public way.  
Ecelin lifts two writhen hands to pray  
At Oliero's convent now : so, place  
For Azzo, Lion of the . . . why disgrace  
A worthiness conspicuous near and far  
(Atii at Rome while free and consular,  
Este at Padua to repulse the Hun)  
By trumpeting the Church's princely son  
Styled Patron of Rovigo's Polesine,  
Ancona's March, Ferrara's . . . ask, in fine,  
Your chronicles, commenced when some old monk  
Found it intolerable to be sunk

(Vexed to the quick by his revolting cell)  
Quite out of summer while alive and well :  
Ended when by his mat the Prior stood,  
Mid busy promptings of the brotherhood,  
Striving to coax from his decrepit brains  
The reason Father Porphyry took pains  
To blot those ten lines out which used to stand  
First on their charter drawn by Hildebrand.

The same night wears. Verona's rule of yore  
Was vested in a certain Twenty-four ;  
And while within his palace these debate  
Concerning Richard and Ferrara's fate,  
Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare  
Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care  
For aught that's seen or heard until we shut  
The smother in, the lights, all noises but  
The carroch's booming ; safe at last ! Why strange  
Such a recess should lurk behind a range  
Of banquet-rooms ? Your finger—thus—you push  
A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush  
Upon the banqueters, select your prey,  
Waiting, the slaughter-weapons in the way  
Strewing this very bench, with sharpened ear  
A preconcerted signal to appear ;

Or if you simply crouch with beating heart  
Bearing in some voluptuous pageant part  
To startle them. Nor mutes nor masquers now ;  
Nor any . . . does that one man sleep whose brow  
The dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er ?  
What woman stood beside him ? not the more  
Is he unfastened from the earnest eyes  
Because that arras fell between ! Her wise  
And lulling words are yet about the room,  
Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom  
Down even to her vesture's creeping stir :  
And so reclines he, saturate with her,  
Until an outcry from the square beneath  
Pierces the charm : he springs up, glad to breathe  
Above the cunning element, and shakes  
The stupor off as (look you) morning breaks  
On the gay dress, and, near concealed by it,  
The lean frame like a half-burnt taper, lit  
Erst at some marriage-feast, then laid away  
Till the Armenian bridegroom's dying-day,  
In his wool wedding-robe ; for he—for he—  
“ Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy ”  
(If I should falter now)—for he is Thine !  
Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine !

A herald-star I know thou didst absorb  
Relentless into the consummate orb  
That scared it from its right to roll along  
A sempiternal path with dance and song  
Fulfilling its allotted period  
Serenest of the progeny of God  
Who yet resigns it not ; his darling stoops  
With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank troops  
Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent  
Utterly with thee, its shy element  
Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear :  
Still, what if I approach the august sphere  
Named now with only one name, disentwine  
That under current soft and argentine  
From its fierce mate in the majestic mass  
Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass  
In John's transcendent vision, launch once more  
That lustre ? Dante, pacer of the shore  
Where gluttoned Hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,  
Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—  
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope  
Into a darkness quieted by hope—  
Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye  
In gracious twilights where his Chosen lie,



I would do this ! if I should falter now—

In Mantua-territory half is slough  
Half pine-tree forest ; maples, scarlet-oaks  
Breed o'er the river-beds ; even Mincio chokes  
With sand the summer through ; but 'tis morass  
In winter up to Mantua walls. There was  
(Some thirty years before this evening's coil)  
One spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil,  
Goito ; just a castle built amid  
A few low mountains ; firs and larches hid  
Their main defiles and rings of vineyard bound  
The rest : some captured creature in a pound,  
Whose artless wonder quite precludes distress,  
Secure beside in its own loveliness,  
So peered with airy head, below, above,  
The castle at its toils the lapwings love  
To glean among at grape-time. Pass within :  
A maze of corridors contrived for sin,  
Dusk winding-stairs, dim galleries got past,  
You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last  
A maple-panelled room : that haze which seems  
Floating about the panel, if there gleams  
A sunbeam over it will turn to gold  
And in light-graven characters unfold



The Arab's wisdom everywhere ; what shade  
Marred them a moment, those slim pillars made,  
Cut like a company of palms to prop  
The roof, each kissing top entwined with top,  
Leaning together ; in the carver's mind  
Some knot of bacchanals, flushed cheek combined  
With straining forehead, shoulders purpled, hair  
Diffused between, who in a goat-skin bear  
A vintage ; graceful sister-palms : but quick  
To the main wonder now. A vault, see ; thick  
Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits  
Across the buttress suffer light by fits  
Upon a marvel in the midst : nay, stoop—  
A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group  
Round it, each side of it, where'er one sees,  
Upholds it—shrinking Caryatides  
Of just-tinged marble like Eve's liliated flesh  
Beneath her Maker's finger when the fresh  
First pulse of life shot brightening the snow :  
The font's edge burthens every shoulder, so  
They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed,  
Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,  
Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil  
Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,

Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length  
Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength  
Goes when the grate above shuts heavily ;  
So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,  
Like priestesses because of sin impure  
Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,  
Having that once drunk sweetness to the dregs ;  
And every eve Sordello's visit begs  
Pardon for them : constant as eve he came  
To sit beside each in her turn, the same  
As one of them, a certain space : and awe  
Made a great indistinctness till he saw  
Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress chinks,  
Gold seven times globed ; surely our maiden shrinks  
And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain  
Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain  
Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt  
From off the rosary whereby the crypt  
Keeps count of the contritions of its charge ?  
Then with a step more light, a heart more large,  
He may depart, leave her and every one  
To linger out the penance in mute stone.  
Ah, but Sordello ? 'Tis the tale I mean  
To tell you. In this castle may be seen,

On the hill tops, or underneath the vines,  
Or southward by the mound of firs and pines  
That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,  
A slender boy in a loose page's dress,  
Sordello : do but look on him awhile  
Watching ('tis autumn) with an earnest smile  
The noisy flock of thievish birds at work  
Among the yellowing vineyards ; see him lurk  
( 'Tis winter with its sullenest of storms)  
Beside that arras-length of broidered forms,  
On tiptoe, lifting in both hands a light  
Which makes yon warrior's visage flutter bright  
—Ecelo, dismal father of the brood,  
And Ecelin, close to the girl he wooed  
—Auria, and their Child, with all his wives  
From Agnes to the Tuscan that survives,  
Lady of the castle, Adelaide : his face  
—Look, now he turns away ! Yourselves shall trace  
(The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,  
A sharp and restless lip, so well combine  
With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive  
Delight at every sense ; you can believe  
Sordello foremost in the regal class  
Nature has broadly severed from her mass

Of men and framed for pleasure as she frames  
Some happy lands that have luxurious names  
For loose fertility ; a footfall there  
Suffices to upturn to the warm air  
Half-germinating spices, mere decay  
Produces richer life, and day by day  
New pollen on the lily-petal grows,  
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.  
You recognise at once the finer dress  
Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness  
At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled  
(As though she would not trust them with her world)  
A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,  
And lets but half the sun look fervid through :  
How can such love like souls on each full-fraught  
Discovery brooding, blind at first to aught  
Beyond its beauty ; till exceeding love  
Becomes an aching weight, and to remove  
A curse that haunts such natures—to preclude  
Their finding out themselves can work no good  
To what they love nor make it very blest  
By their endeavour, they are fain invest  
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul  
Availing it to purpose, to control,

To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy  
And separate interests that may employ  
That beauty fitly, for its proper sake ;  
Nor rest they here : fresh births of beauty wake  
Fresh homage ; every grade of love is past,  
With every mode of loveliness ; then cast  
Inferior idols off their borrowed crown  
Before a coming glory : up and down  
Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine  
To throb the secret forth ; a touch divine—  
And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod :  
Visibly through his garden walketh God.  
So fare they—Now revert : one character  
Denotes them through the progress and the stir ;  
A need to blend with each external charm,  
Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,  
In something not themselves ; they would belong  
To what they worship—stronger and more strong  
Thus prodigally fed—that gathers shape  
And feature, soon imprisons past escape  
The votary framed to love and to submit ,  
Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,  
Whence grew the idol's empery. So runs  
A legend ; Light had birth ere moons and suns,

Flowing through space a river and alone,  
Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown  
Hither and thither, foundering and blind,  
When into each of them rushed Light—to find  
Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.  
Let such forego their just inheritance!  
For there's a class that eagerly looks, too,  
On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,  
Proclaims each new revelation born a twin  
With a distinctest consciousness within  
Referring still the quality, now first  
Revealed, to their own soul; its instinct nursed  
In silence, now remembered better, shown  
More thoroughly, but not the less their own;  
A dream come true; the special exercise  
Of any special function that implies  
The being fair or good or wise or strong,  
Dormant within their nature all along—  
Whose fault? So homage other souls direct  
Without, turns inward; how should this deject  
Thee, soul? they murmur; wherefore strength be quelled  
Because, its trivial accidents withheld,  
Organs are missed that clog the world, inert,  
Wanting a will, to quicken and exert,



Like thine—existence cannot satiate  
Cannot surprise : laugh thou at envious fate,  
Who from earth's simplest combination stamp  
With individuality—uncrampt  
By living its faint elemental life,  
Dost soar to heaven's completest essence, rife  
With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,  
Equal to being all.

                                    In truth ? Thou hast  
Life, then—wilt challenge life for us : thy race  
Is vindicated so, obtains its place  
In thy ascent, the first of us ; whom we  
May follow, to the meanest, finally,  
With our more bounded wills ?

  Ah, but to find  
A certain mood enervate such a mind,  
Counsel it slumber in the solitude  
Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind's good  
Its nature just as life and time accord  
(Too narrow an arena to reward  
Emprize—the world's occasion worthless since  
Not absolutely fitted to evince  
Its mastery) or if yet worse befall,  
And a desire possess it to put all



That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere  
Contain it ; to display completely here  
The mastery another life should learn,  
Thrusting in time eternity's concern,  
So that Sordello . . . Fool, who spied the mark  
Of leprosy upon him, violet dark  
Already as he loiters ? Born just now—  
With the new century—beside the glow  
And efflorescence out of barbarism ;  
Witness a Greek or two from the abysm  
That stray through Florence-town with studious air,  
Calming the chisel of that Pisan pair . . .  
If Nicolo should carve a Christus yet !  
While at Sienna is Guidone set,  
Forehead on hand ; a painful birth must be  
Matured ere San Eufemio's sacristy  
Or transept gather fruits of one great gaze  
At the noon-sun : look you ! An orange haze—  
The same blue stripe round that—and, i'the midst,  
Thy spectral whiteness, mother-maid, who didst  
Pursue the dizzy painter !

Woe then worth

Any officious babble letting forth  
The leprosy confirmed and ruinous  
To spirit lodged in a contracted house !

Go back to the beginning rather ; blend  
It gently with Sordello's life ; the end  
Is piteous, you shall see, but much between  
Pleasant enough ; meantime some pyx to screen  
The full-grown pest, some lid to shut upon  
The goblin ! As they found at Babylon,  
(Colleagues mad Lucius and sage Antonine)  
Sacking the city, by Apollo's shrine  
Its pride, in rummaging the rarities,  
A cabinet ; be sure, who made the prize  
Opened it greedily ; and out there curled  
Just such another plague, for half the world  
Was stung. Crawl in then, hag, and crouch asquat,  
Keeping that blotchy bosom thick in spot  
Until your time is ripe ! The coffer-lid  
Is fastened and the coffer safely hid  
Under the Loxian's choicest gifts of gold.  
Who will may hear Sordello's story told,  
And how he never could remember when  
He dwelt not at Goito ; calmly then  
About this secret lodge of Adelaide's  
Glided his youth away : beyond the glades  
On the fir-forest's border, and the rim  
Of the low range of mountain, was for him

No other world : but that appeared his own  
To wander through at pleasure and alone.  
The castle too seemed empty ; far and wide  
Might he disport unless the northern side  
Lay under a mysterious interdict—  
Slight, just enough remembered to restrict  
His roaming to the corridors, the vault  
Where those font-bearers expiate their fault,  
The maple-chamber, and the little nooks  
And nests and breezy parapet that looks  
Over the woods to Mantua ; there he strolled.  
Some foreign women-servants, very old,  
Tended and crept about him—all his clue  
To the world's business and embroiled ado  
Distant a dozen hill-tops at the most.  
And first a simple sense of life engrossed  
Sordello in his drowsy Paradise ;  
The day's adventures for the day suffice—  
Its constant tribute of perceptions strange  
With sleep and stir in healthy interchange  
Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease  
Like the great palmer-worm that strips the trees,  
Eats the life out of every luscious plant,  
And when September finds them sere or scant

Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,  
And hies him after unforeseen delight ;  
So fed Sordello, not a shard disheathed ;  
As ever round each new discovery wreathed  
Luxuriantly the fancies infantine  
His admiration, bent on making fine  
Its novel friend at any risk, would fling  
In gay profusion forth : a ficklest king  
Confessed those minions ! Eager to dispense  
So much from his own stock of thought and sense  
As might enable each to stand alone  
And serve him for a fellow ; with his own  
Joining the qualities that just before  
Had graced some older favourite : so they wore  
A fluctuating halo, yesterday  
Set flicker and to-morrow filched away ;  
Those upland objects each of separate name,  
Each with an aspect never twice the same,  
Waxing and waning as the new-born host  
Of fancies, like a single night's hoar-frost,  
Gave to familiar things a face grotesque ;  
Only, preserving through the mad burlesque  
A grave regard : conceive ; the orpine patch  
Blossoming earliest on our log-house-thatch

The day those archers wound along the vines—  
Related to the Chief that left their lines  
To climb with clinking step the northern stair  
Up to the solitary chambers where  
Sordello never came. Thus thrall reached thrall ;  
He o'er-festooning every interval  
As the adventurous spider, making light  
Of distance, shoots her threads from depth to height,  
From barbican to battlement ; so flung  
Fantasies forth and in their centre swung  
Our architect : the breezy morning fresh  
Above, and merry ; all his waving mesh  
Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.  
This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged  
To laying such a spangled fabric low  
Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow :  
But its abundant will was balked here : doubt  
Rose tardily in one so fenced about  
From most that nurtures judgment, care and pain :  
Judgment, that dull expedient we are fain,  
Less favoured, to adopt betimes and force  
Stead us, diverted from our natural course  
Of joys, contrive some yet amid the dearth,  
Vary and render them, it may be, worth

Most we forego : suppose Sordello hence  
Selfish enough, without a moral sense  
However feeble ; what informed the boy  
Others desired a portion in his joy ?  
Or say a ruthless chance broke woof and warp—  
A heron's nest beat down by March winds sharp,  
A fawn breathless beneath the precipice,  
A bird with unsoiled breast and filmless eyes  
Warm in the brake—could these undo the trance  
Lapping Sordello ? Not a circumstance  
That makes for you, friend Naddo ! Eat fern-seed  
And peer beside us and report indeed  
If (your word) Genius dawned with throes and stings  
And the whole fiery catalogue, while springs  
Summers and winters quietly came and went,  
Putting at length that period to content  
By right the world should have imposed : bereft  
Of its good offices, Sordello, left  
To study his companions, managed rip  
Their fringe off, learn the true relationship,  
Core with its crust, their natures with his own ;  
Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone :  
As if the poppy felt with him ! Though he  
Partook the poppy's red effrontery



Till Autumn spoils their fleering quite with rain,  
And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane  
Protrudes : that's gone ! yet why renounce, for that,  
His disenchanted tributaries—flat  
Perhaps, but scarce so utterly forlorn  
Their simple presence may not well be borne  
Whose parley was a transport once : recall  
The poppy's gifts, it flaunts you, after all,  
A poppy : why distrust the evidence  
Of each soon satisfied and healthy sense ?  
The new-born Judgment answered : little boots  
Beholding other creatures' attributes  
And having none : or say that it sufficed,  
Yet, could one but possess, oneself, (enticed  
Judgment) some special office ! Nought beside  
Serves you ? Well then, be somehow justified  
For this ignoble wish to circumscribe  
And concentrate, rather than swell, the tribe  
Of actual pleasures : what now from without  
Effects it ?—proves, despite a lurking doubt,  
Mere sympathy sufficient, trouble spared ;  
—He tasted joys by proxy, clearly fared  
The better for them ; thus much craved his soul.  
Alas, from the beginning Love is whole



And true ; if sure of nought beside, most sure  
Of its own truth at least ; nor may endure  
A crowd to see its face, that cannot know  
How hot the pulses throb its heart below ;  
While its own helplessness and utter want  
Of means to worthily be ministrant  
To what it worships, do but fan the more  
Its flame, exalt the idol far before  
Itself as it would ever have it be ;  
Souls like Sordello, on the contrary,  
Coerced and put to shame, retaining Will,  
Care little, take mysterious comfort still,  
But look forth tremblingly to ascertain  
If others judge their claims not urged in vain  
—Will say for them their stifled thoughts aloud ;  
So they must ever live before a crowd :  
Vanity, Naddo tells you.

Whence contrive

A crowd, now ? These brave women just alive,  
That archer-troop ? Forth glided—not alone  
Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,  
—Nor Adelaide bent double o'er a scroll,  
One maiden at her knees, that eve his soul  
Shook as he stumbled through the arras'd glooms  
On them, for, 'mid quaint robes and weird perfumes,

Started the meagre Tuscan up (her eyes  
The maiden's also, bluer with surprise)  
—But the entire out-world : whatever scraps  
And snatches, song and story, dreams perhaps,  
Conceited the world's offices, and he  
Transferred to the first comer, flower or tree,  
Nor counted a befitting heritage  
Each, of its own right, singly to engage  
Some Man, no other ; such availed to stand  
Alone : strength, wisdom, grace on every hand  
Soon disengaged themselves ; and he discerned  
A sort of human life : at least, was turned  
A stream of life-like figures through his brain  
—Lord, Liegeman, Valvassor and Suzerain,  
Ere he could choose, surrounded him ; a stuff  
To work his pleasure on ; there, sure enough,  
But as for gazing, what shall fix that gaze ?  
Are they to simply testify the ways  
He who convoked them sends his soul along  
With the cloud's thunder or a dove's brood-song ?  
While they live each its life, boast each its own  
Peculiar dower of bliss, stand each alone  
In some one point where something dearest loved  
Is easiest gained—far worthier to be proved

Than aught he envies in the forest-wights !  
No simple and self-evident delights,  
But mixed desires of unimagined range,  
Contrasts or combinations, new and strange,  
Irksome perhaps, yet plainly recognised  
By this, the sudden company—loves prized  
By those who are to prize his own amount  
Of loves. Once care because such make account,  
Allow a foreign recognition stamp  
The current value, and your crowd shall vamp  
You counterfeits enough ; and so their print  
Be on the piece, 'tis gold, attests the mint  
And good, pronounce they whom my new appeal  
Is made to : if their casual print conceal—  
This arbitrary good of theirs o'ergloss  
What I have lived without, nor felt my loss—  
Qualities strange, ungainly, wearisome,  
—What matter ? so must speech expand the dumb  
Part sigh, part smile with which Sordello, late  
No foolish woodland-sights could satiate,  
Betakes himself to study hungrily  
Just what the puppets his crude fantasy  
Supposes notablest, popes, kings, priests, knights,  
May please to promulgate for appetites ;

Accepting all their artificial joys  
Not as he views them, but as he employs  
Each shape to estimate the other's stock  
Of attributes, that on a marshalled flock  
Of authorised enjoyments he may spend  
Himself, be Men, now, as he used to blend  
With tree and flower—nay more entirely, else  
'Twere mockery : for instance, how excels  
My life that Chieftain's ? (who apprised the youth  
Ecelin, here, becomes this month in truth,  
Imperial Vicar ?) Turns he in his tent  
Remissly ? Be it so—my head is bent  
Deliciously amid my girls to sleep :  
What if he stalks the Trentine-pass ? Yon steep  
I climbed an hour ago with little toil—  
We are alike there : but can I, too, foil  
The Guelfs' paid stabber, carelessly afford  
St. Mark's a spectacle, the sleight o' the sword  
Baffling their project in a moment ? Here  
No rescue ! Poppy he is none, but peer  
To Ecelin, assuredly : his hand,  
Fashioned no otherwise, should wield a brand  
With Ecelin's success—try, now ! He soon  
Was satisfied, returned as to the moon

From earth ; left each abortive boy's-attempt  
For feats, from failure happily exempt,  
In fancy at his beck. One day I will  
Accomplish it ! Are they not older still  
—Not grown up men and women ? 'Tis beside  
Only a dream ; and though I must abide  
With dreams now, I may find a thorough vent  
For all myself, acquire an instrument  
For acting what these people act ; my soul  
Hunting a body out, obtain its whole  
Desire some day ! How else express chagrin  
And resignation, show the hope steal in  
With which he let sink from an aching wrist  
The rough-hewn ash bow, and a gold shaft hiss'd  
Into the Syrian air, struck Malek down  
Superbly ! Crosses to the breach ! God's Town  
Was gained Him back ! Why bend rough ash-bows  
So lives he : if not careless as before, [more ?  
Comforted : for one may anticipate,  
Rehearse the future ; be prepared when fate  
Shall have prepared in turn real men whose names  
Startle, real places of enormous fames,  
Estes abroad and Ecelins at home  
To worship him, Mantuas, Veronas, Rome

To witness it. Who grudges time so spent ?  
Rather test qualities to heart's content—  
Summon them, thrice selected, near and far—  
Compress the starriest into one star  
So grasp the whole at once ! The pageant's thinned  
Accordingly ; from rank to rank, like wind  
His spirit passed to winnow and divide ;  
Back fell the simpler phantasms ; every side  
The strong clave to the wise ; with either classed  
The beauteous ; so, till two or three amassed  
Mankind's beseemingnesses, and reduced  
Themselves eventually, graces loosed,  
And lavished strengths, to heighten up One Shape  
Whose potency no creature should escape :  
Can it be Friedrich of the bowmen's talk ?  
Surely that grape-juice, bubbling at the stalk,  
Is some grey scorching Saracenic wine  
The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline—  
Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped,  
Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped,  
Are dates plucked from the bough John Brienne sent  
To keep in mind his sluggish armament  
Of Canaan . . . Friedrich's, all the pomp and fierce  
Demeanour ! But harsh sounds and sights transpierce



So rarely the serene cloud where he dwells  
Whose looks enjoin, whose lightest words are spells  
Upon the obdurate ; that arm indeed  
Has thunder for its slave ; but where's the need  
Of thunder if the stricken multitude  
Hearkens, arrested in its angriest mood,  
While songs go up exulting, then dispread,  
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead  
Like an escape of angels ? 'Tis the tune,  
Nor much unlike the words the women croon  
Smilingly, colourless and faint designed  
Each as a worn-out queen's face some remind  
Of her extreme youth's love-tales. Eglamor  
Made that ! Half minstrel and half emperor,  
Who but ill objects vexed him ? Such he slew.  
The kinder sort were easy to subdue  
By those ambrosial glances, dulcet tones ;  
And these a gracious hand advanced to thrones  
Beneath him. Wherefore twist and torture this,  
Striving to name afresh the antique bliss,  
Instead of saying, neither less nor more,  
He had discovered, as our world before,  
Apollo ? That shall be the name ; nor bid  
Me rag by rag expose how patchwork hid



The man—what thefts of every clime and day  
Contributed to purfle the array  
He climbs with (June's at deep) some close ravine  
'Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,  
Over which singing soft the runnel slipt  
Elate with rains : into whose streamlet dipt  
He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock—  
Though really on the stubs of living rock  
Ages ago it crenneled ; vines for roof,  
Lindens for wall ; before him, aye aloof,  
Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly,  
Child of the simmering quiet, there to die :  
Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied  
Mighty descents of forest ; multiplied  
Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees ;  
There gendered the grave maple-stocks at ease ;  
And, proud of its observer, strait the wood  
Tried old surprises on him ; black it stood  
A sudden barrier ('twas a cloud passed o'er)  
So dead and dense the tiniest brute no more  
Must pass ; yet presently (the cloud despatched)  
Each clump, forsooth, was glistening detached  
A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems !  
Yet could not he denounce the stratagems

He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang  
White summer-lightnings ; as it sank and sprang  
In measure, that whole palpitating breast  
Of Heaven, 'twas Apollo nature prest  
At eve to worship.

Time stole : by degrees  
The Pythons perished off ; his votaries  
Sunk to respectful distance ; songs redeem  
Their pains, but briefer ; their dismissals seem  
Emphatic ; only girls are very slow  
To disappear : his Delians ! Some that glow  
O' the instant, more with earlier loves to wrench  
Away, reserves to quell, disdains to quench ;  
Alike in one material circumstance—  
All soon or late adore Apollo ! Glance  
The bevy through, divine Apollo's choice,  
A Daphne ! We secure Count Richard's voice  
In Este's counsels, one for Este's ends  
As our Taurello, say his faded friends,  
By granting him our Palma ! The sole child,  
They mean, of Agnes Este who beguiled  
Ecelin, years before this Adelaide  
Wedded and turned him wicked ; but the maid  
Rejects his suit, those sleepy women boast.  
She, scorning all beside, deserves the most

Sordello : so conspicuous in his world  
Of dreams sate Palma. How the tresses curled  
Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound  
About her like a glory, even the ground [breathe  
Was bright as with shed sunbeams; (breathe not,  
Not)—poised, see, one leg doubled underneath,  
Its small foot buried in the dimpling snow,  
Rests, but the other, listlessly below,  
O'er the couch-side swings feeling for cool air,  
The vein-streaks swoln a richer violet where  
The languid blood lies heavily ; and calm  
On her slight prop, each flat and outspread palm,  
As but suspended in the act to rise  
By consciousness of beauty, whence her eyes  
Turn with so frank a triumph, for she meets  
Apollo's gaze in the pine-glooms.

Time fleets

That's worst ! Because the pre-appointed age  
Approaches. Fate is tardy with the stage  
She all but promised. Lean he grows and pale,  
Though restlessly at rest. Hardly avail  
Fancies to soothe him. Time steals, yet alone  
He tarries here ! The earnest smile is gone.  
How long this might continue matters not :  
For ever, possibly ; since to the spot

None come : for lingering Taurello quits  
Mantua at last, and light our lady flits  
Back to her place disburthened of a care.  
Strange—to be constant here if he is there !  
Is it distrust ? Oh, never ! for they both  
Goad Ecelin alike—Romano's growth  
So daily manifest that Azzo's dumb  
And Richard wavers . . . let but Friedrich come !  
—Find matter for the minstrelsy's report  
Lured from the Isle and its young Kaiser's court  
To sing us a Messina morning up ;  
Who, double rillets of a drinking cup,  
Sparkle along to ease the land of drouth,  
Northward to Provence that, and thus far south  
The other : what a method to apprise  
Neighbours of births, espousals, obsequies !  
Which in their very tongue the Troubadour  
Records ; and his performance makes a tour,  
For Trouveres bear the miracle about,  
Explain its cunning to the vulgar rout,  
Until the Formidable House is famed  
Over the country—as Taurello aimed  
Who introduced, although the rest adopt,  
The novelty. Their games her absence stopped

Begin afresh now Adelaide, recluse  
No longer, in the light of day pursues  
Her plans at Mantua—whence an accident  
That breaking on Sordello's mixed content  
Opened, like any flash that cures the blind,  
The veritable business of mankind.

## BOOK THE SECOND.

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THE woods were long austere with snow : at last  
Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast  
Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,  
Brightened, “as in the slumbrous heart o’ the woods  
Our buried year, a witch, grew young again  
To placid incantations, and that stain  
About were from her caldron, green smoke blent  
With those black pines”—so Eglamor gave vent  
To a chance fancy : whence a just rebuke  
From his companion ; brother Naddo shook  
The solemnest of brows ; Beware, he said,  
Of setting up conceits in Nature’s stead !  
Forth wandered our Sordello. Nought so sure  
As that to-day’s adventure will secure  
Palma, the forest-lady—only pass  
O’er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,

Under that brake where sundawn feeds the stalks  
Of withered fern with gold, into those walks  
Of pine, and take her! Buoyantly he went.  
Again his stooping forehead was besprent  
With dew-drops from the skirting ferns. Then wide  
Opened the great morass, shot every side  
With flashing water through and through; a-shine,  
Thick steaming, all alive. Whose shape divine  
Quivered i' the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced  
Athwart the flying herons? He advanced,  
But warily; though Mincio leaped no more,  
Each foot-fall burst up in the marish-floor  
A diamond jet: and if you stopped to pick  
Rose-lichen, or molest the leeches quick,  
And circling blood-worms, minnow, newt or loach,  
A sudden pond would silently encroach  
This way and that. On Palma passed. The verge  
Of a new wood was gained. She will emerge  
Flushed, now, and panting; crowds to see; will own  
She loves him—Boniface to hear, to groan,  
To leave his suit! One screen of pine-trees still  
Opposes: but—the startling spectacle—  
Mantua, this time! Under the walls—a crowd  
Indeed—real men and women—gay and loud



Round a pavilion. How he stood !

In truth

No prophecy had come to pass : his youth  
In its prime now—and where was homage poured  
Upon Sordello ?—born to be adored,  
And suddenly discovered weak, scarce made  
To cope with any, cast into the shade  
By this and this. Yet something seemed to prick  
And tingle in his blood ; a sleight—a trick—  
And much would be explained. It went for naught—  
The best of their endowments were ill bought  
With his identity : nay, the conceit  
This present roving leads to Palma's feet  
Was not so vain . . . list ! The word, Palma ? Steal  
Aside, and die, Sordello ; this is real,  
And this—abjure !

What next ? The curtains, see,  
Dividing ! She is there ; and presently  
He will be there—the proper You, at length—  
In your own cherished dress of grace and strength :  
Most like the very Boniface . . .

Not so.

It was a showy man advanced ; but though  
A glad cry welcomed him, then every sound  
Sank and the crowd disposed themselves around,

—This is not he, Sordello felt ; while “ Place  
For the best Troubadour of Boniface,”  
Hollaed the Jongleurs, “ Eglamor whose lay  
Concludes his patron’s Court of Love to-day.”  
Obsequious Naddo strung his master’s lute  
With the new lute-string, Elys, named to suit  
The song : He stealthily at watch, the while,  
Biting his lip to keep down a great smile  
Of pride : then up he struck. Sordello’s brain  
Swam ; for he knew a sometime deed again ;  
So could supply each foolish gap and chasm  
The minstrel left in his enthusiasm,  
Mistaking its true version—was the tale  
Not of Apollo ? Only, what avail  
Luring her down, that Elys an he pleased,  
If the man dares no further ? Has he ceased ?  
And, lo, the people’s frank applause half done,  
Sordello was beside him, had begun  
(Spite of indignant twitchings from his friend  
The Trouvere) the true lay with the true end,  
Taking the other’s names and time and place  
For his. On flew the song, a giddy race,  
After the flying story ; word made leap  
Out word ; rhyme—rhyme ; the lay could barely keep

Pace with the action visibly rushing past :  
Both ended. Back fell Naddo more aghast  
Than your Egyptian from the harassed bull  
That wheels abrupt and, bellowing, fronts full  
His plague, who spies a scarab 'neath his tongue,  
And finds 'twas Apis' flank his hasty prong  
Insulted. But the people—but the cries,  
And crowding round, and proffering the prize !  
(For he had gained some prize)—He seemed to shrink  
Into a sleepy cloud, just at whose brink  
One sight withheld him ; there sat Adelaide,  
Silent ; but at her knees the very maid  
Of the North Chamber, her red lips as rich,  
The same pure fleecy hair ; one curl of which,  
Golden and great, quite touched his cheek as o'er  
She leant, speaking some six words and no more ;  
He answered something, anything ; and she  
Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily  
Upon him, her neck's warmth and all ; again  
Moved the arrested magic ; in his brain  
Noises grew, and a light that turned to glare,  
And greater glare, until the intense flare  
Engulfed him, shut the whole scene from his sense,  
And when he woke 'twas many a furlong thence,

At home : the sun shining his ruddy wont ;  
The customary birds'-chirp ; but his front [around  
Was crowned—was crowned ! Her scented scarf  
His neck ! Whose gorgeous vesture heaps the ground ?  
A prize ? He turned, and peeringly on him  
Brooded the women faces, kind and dim,  
Ready to talk. The Jongleurs in a troop  
Had brought him back, Naddo and Squarcialupe  
And Tagliafer ; how strange ! a childhood spent  
Assuming, well for him, so brave a bent !  
Since Eglamor, they heard, was dead with spite,  
And Palma chose him for her minstrel.

## Light

Sordello rose—to think, now ; hitherto  
He had perceived. Sure a discovery grew  
Out of it all ! Best live from first to last  
The transport o'er again. A week he passed  
Sucking the sweet out of each circumstance,  
From the bard's outbreak to the luscious trance  
Bounding his own achievement. Strange ! A man  
Recounted that adventure, and began  
Imperfectly ; his own task was to fill  
The frame-work up, sing well what he sang ill,  
Supply the necessary points, set loose  
As many incidents of little use

—More imbecile the other, not to see  
Their relative importance clear as he !  
But for a special pleasure in the act  
Of singing—had he ever turned, in fact,  
From Elys, to sing Elys?—from each fit  
Of rapture, to contrive a song of it ?  
True, this snatch or the other seemed to wind  
Into a treasure, helped himself to find  
A beauty in himself ; for, see, he soared  
By means of that mere snatch to many a hoard  
Of fancies ; as some falling cone bears oft  
The eye, along the fir-tree-spire, aloft  
To a dove's nest. Then how divine the cause  
Such a performance should exact applause  
From men if they have fancies too ? Can Fate  
Decree they find a beauty separate  
In the poor snatch itself . . . our Elys, there,  
(“ Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,  
So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks  
Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks  
Sun-blanced the livelong summer”)—if they heard  
Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,  
And loved them as I love them who have run  
These fingers through those fine locks, let the sun

Into the white cool skin . . . nay, thus I clutch  
Those locks !—I needs must be a God to such.  
Or if some few, above themselves, and yet  
Beneath me, like their Eglamor, have set  
An impress on our gift? So men believe  
And worship what they know not, nor receive  
Delight from. Have they fancies—slow, perchance,  
Not at their beck, which indistinctly glance  
Until by song each floating part be linked  
To each, and all grow palpable, distinct?  
He pondered this.

Meanwhile sounds low and drear  
Stole on him, and a noise of footsteps, near  
And nearer, and the underwood was pushed  
Aside, the larches grazed, the dead leaves crushed  
At the approach of men. The wind seemed laid;  
Only, the trees shrunk slightly and a shade  
Came o'er the sky although 'twas midday yet:  
You saw each half-shut downcast violet  
Flutter—a Roman bride, when they dispart  
Her unbound tresses with the Sabine dart,  
Holding that famous rape in memory still,  
Felt creep into her curls the iron chill,  
And looked thus, Eglamor would say—indeed  
'Tis Eglamor, no other, these precede



Home hither in the woods. 'Twere surely sweet  
Far from the scene of one's forlorn defeat  
To sleep ! thought Naddo, who in person led  
Jongleurs and Trouveres, chanting at their head,  
A scanty company ; for, sooth to say,  
Our beaten Troubadour had seen his day :  
Old worshippers were something shamed, old friends  
Nigh weary ; still the death proposed amends :  
Let us but get them safely through my song  
And home again, quoth Naddo.

All along,

This man (they rest the bier upon the sand)  
—This calm corpse with the loose flowers in its hand,  
Eglamor, lived Sordello's opposite :  
For him indeed was Naddo's notion right  
And Verse a temple-worship vague and vast,  
A ceremony that withdrew the last  
Opposing bolt, looped back the lingering veil  
Which hid the holy place—should one so frail  
Stand there without such effort ? or repine  
That much was blank, uncertain at the shrine  
He knelt before, till, soothed by many a rite,  
The Power responded, and some sound or sight  
Grew up, his own forever ! to be fixed  
In rhyme, the beautiful, forever ; mixed



With his own life, unloosed when he should please,  
Having it safe at hand, ready to ease  
All pain, remove all trouble ; every time  
He loosed that fancy from its bonds of rhyme,  
Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love,  
Faltering ; so distinct and far above  
Himself, these fancies ! He, no genius rare,  
Transfiguring in fire or wave or air  
At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up,  
In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,  
His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few  
And their arrangement finds enough to do  
For his best art. Then, how he loved that art !  
The calling marking him a man apart  
From men—one not to care, take counsel for  
Cold hearts, comfortless faces (Eglamor  
Was neediest of his tribe) since verse, the gift,  
Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift  
Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth  
And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.  
So Eglamor was not without his pride !  
The sorriest bat which cowers through noontide  
While other birds are jocund, has one time  
When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime

Of earth is its to claim, nor find a peer ;  
And Eglamor was noblest poet here,  
He knew, among the April woods he cast  
Conceits upon in plenty as he past,  
That Naddo might suppose him not to think  
Entirely on the coming triumph ; wink  
At the one weakness ! 'Twas a fervid child  
That song of his—no brother of the guild  
Had e'er conceived its like. The rest you know ;  
The exaltation and the overthrow ;  
Our poet lost his purpose, lost his rank,  
His life—to that it came. Yet envy sank  
Within him, as he heard Sordello out,  
And, for the first time, shouted—tried to shout  
Like others, not from any zeal to show  
Pleasure that way : the common sort did so,  
And what was Eglamor ? who, bending down  
The same, placed his beneath Sordello's crown,  
Printed a kiss on his successor's hand,  
Left one great tear on it, then joined his band  
—In time ; for some were watching at the door—  
Who knows what envy may effect ? Give o'er,  
Nor charm his lips, nor craze him ! (here one spied  
And disengaged the withered crown)—Beside

His crown ! How prompt and clear those verses rung  
To answer yours ! nay sing them ! And he sung  
Them calmly. Home he went ; friends used to wait  
His coming, anxious to congratulate,  
But, to a man, so quickly runs report,  
Could do no less than leave him, and escort  
His rival. That eve, then, bred many a thought  
What must his future life be : was he brought  
So low, who was so lofty this spring morn ?  
At length he said, Best sleep now with my scorn,  
And by to-morrow I devise some plain  
Expedient ! So he slept, nor woke again.  
They found as much, those friends, when they returned  
O'erflowing with the marvels they had learned  
About Sordello's paradise, his roves  
Among the hills and valleys, plains and groves,  
Wherein, no doubt, this lay was roughly cast,  
Polished by slow degrees, completed last  
To Eglamor's discomfiture and death.

Such form the chanters now, and, out of breath,  
They lay the beaten man in his abode,  
Naddo reciting that same luckless ode,  
Doleful to hear : Sordello could explore  
By means of it, however, one step more

In joy ; and, mastering the round at length,  
Learnt how to live in weakness as in strength,  
When from his covert forth he stood, addressed  
Eglamor, bade the tender ferns invest,  
Primeval pines o'er canopy his couch,  
And, most of all, his fame—(shall I avouch  
Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,  
And laughed as from his brow Sordello took  
The crown, and laid it on his breast, and said,  
It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head ?)  
—Continue. Nor the prayer quite fruitless fell ;  
A plant they have yielding a three-leaved bell  
Which whitens at the heart ere noon, and ails  
Till evening ; evening gives it to her gales  
To clear away with such forgotten things  
As are an eyesore to the morn : this brings  
Him to their mind, and bears his very name.

So much for Eglamor. My own month came ;  
'Twas a sunrise of blossoming and May.  
Beneath a flowering laurel thicket lay  
Sordello ; each new sprinkle of white stars  
That smell fainter of wine than Massic jars  
Dug up at Baiaë, when the south wind shed  
The ripest, made him happier ; filleted

And robed the same, only a lute beside  
Lay on the turf. Before him far and wide  
The country stretched : Goito slept behind  
—The castle and its covert which confined  
Him with his hopes and fears ; so fain of old  
To leave the story of his birth untold.  
At intervals, 'spite the fantastic glow  
Of his Apollo-life, a certain low  
And wretched whisper winding through the bliss  
Admonished, no such fortune could be his,  
All was quite false and sure to fade one day :  
The closelier drew he round him his array  
Of brilliance to expel the truth. But when  
A reason for his difference from men  
Surprised him at the grave, he took no rest  
While aught of that old life, superbly drest  
Down to its meanest incident, remained  
A mystery—alas, they soon explained  
Away Apollo ! and the tale amounts  
To this : when at Vicenza both her Counts  
Banished the Vivaresi kith and kin,  
Those Maltraversi hung on Ecelin,  
Reviling as he followed ; he for spite  
Must fire their quarter, though that self-same night

Among the flames young Ecelin was born  
Of Adelaide, there too, and barely torn  
From the roused populace hard on the rear  
By a poor archer when his chieftain's fear  
Was high ; into the thick Elcorte leapt,  
Saved her, and died ; no creature left except  
His child to thank. And when the full escape  
Was known—how men impaled from chine to nape  
Unlucky Prata, all to pieces spurned  
Bishop Pistore's concubines, and burned  
Taurello's entire household, flesh and fell,  
Missing the sweeter prey—such courage well  
Might claim reward. The orphan, ever since,  
Sordello, had been nurtured by his prince  
Within a blind retreat where Adelaide  
(For, once this notable discovery made,  
The past at every point was understood)  
Can harbour easily when times are rude,  
When Este schemes for Palma—would retrieve  
That pledge, when Mantua is not fit to leave  
Longer unguarded with a vigilant eye,  
Taurello bides there so ambiguously  
(He who can have no motive now to moil  
For his own fortunes since their utter spoil)



As it were worth while yet (goes the report)  
To disengage himself from us. In short,  
Apollo vanished ; a mean youth, just named  
His lady's minstrel, was to be proclaimed  
—How shall I phrase it ? Monarch of the World.  
But on the morning that array was furled  
For ever, and in place of one a slave  
To longings, wild, indeed, but longings save  
In dreams as wild, suppressed—one daring not  
Assume the mastery such dreams allot,  
Until a magical equipment, strength  
Grace, wisdom, decked him too,—he chose at length  
(Content with unproved wits and failing frame)  
In virtue of his simple Will, to claim  
That mastery, no less—to do his best  
With means so limited, and let the rest  
Go by,—the seal was set : never again  
Sordello could in his own sight remain  
One of the many, one with hopes and cares  
And interests nowise distinct from theirs,  
Only peculiar in a thriveless store  
Of fancies, which were fancies and no more ;  
Never again for him and for the crowd  
A common law was challenged and allowed



If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied  
By a mad impulse nothing justified  
Short of Apollo's presence : the divorce  
Is clear : why needs Sordello square his course  
By any known example ? Men no more  
Compete with him than tree and flower before ;  
Himself, inactive, yet is greater far  
Than such as act, each stooping to his star,  
Acquiring thence his function ; he has gained  
The same result with meaner mortals trained  
To strength or beauty, moulded to express  
Each the idea that rules him ; since no less  
He comprehends that function but can still  
Embrace the others, take of Might his fill  
With Richard as of Grace with Palma, mix  
Their qualities, or for a moment fix  
On one, abiding free meantime, uncramped  
By any partial organ, never stamped  
Strong, so to Strength turning all energies—  
Wise, and restricted to becoming Wise—  
That is, he loves not, nor possesses One  
Idea that, star-like over, lures him on  
To its exclusive purpose. Fortunate  
This flesh of mine ne'er strove to emulate

A soul so various—took no casual mould  
Of the first fancy and contracted, cold  
Lay clogged forever thence, averse to change  
As that. Whereas it left her free to range,  
Remains itself a blank, cast into shade,  
Encumbers little, if it cannot aid.  
So, range, my soul ! Who by self-consciousness  
The last drop of all beauty dost express—  
The grace of seeing grace, a quintessence  
For thee : but for the world, that can dispense  
Wonder on men, themselves that wonder—make  
A shift to love at second hand and take  
Those for its idols who but idolize,  
Themselves,—that loves the soul as strong, as wise,  
Whose love is Strength, is Wisdom,—such shall bow  
Surely in unexampled worship now,  
Discerning me !—

(Dear monarch, I beseech,  
Notice how lamentably wide a breach  
Is here ! discovering this, discover too  
What our poor world has possibly to do  
With it ! As pigmy natures as you please—  
So much the better for you ; take your ease ;  
Look on, and laugh ; style yourself God alone ;  
Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone ;

All that is right enough : but why want us  
 To know that you yourself know thus and thus ?  
 Nay finish—)

—Bow to me conceiving all  
 Man's life, who see its blisses, great and small,  
 Afar—not tasting any : no machine  
 To exercise my utmost will is mine,  
 Therefore mere consciousness for me !—Perceive  
 What I could do, a mastery believe,  
 Asserted and established to the throng  
 By their selected evidence of Song  
 Which now shall prove whate'er they are, or seek  
 To be, I am—who take no pains to speak,  
 Change no old standards of perfection, vex  
 With no strange forms created to perplex,  
 But mean perform their bidding and no more,  
 At their own satiating-point give o'er,  
 And each shall love in me the love that leads  
 His soul to its perfection. Song, not Deeds,  
 (For we get tired) was chosen. Fate would brook  
 Mankind no other organ ; He would look  
 For not another channel to dispense  
 His own volition and receive their sense  
 Of its existing, but would be content,  
 Obstructed else, with merely verse for vent—

Nor should, for instance, Strength an outlet seek  
And striving be admired, nor Grace bespeak  
Wonder, displayed in gracious attitudes,  
Nor Wisdom, poured forth, change unseemly moods ;  
But he would give and take on Song's one point :  
Like some huge throbbing-stone that, poised a-joint,  
Sounds to affect on its basaltic bed  
Must sue in just one accent : tempests shed  
Thunder, and raves the landstorm : only let  
That key by any little noise be set—  
The far benighted hunter's halloo pitch  
On that, the hungry curlew chance to scritch  
Or serpent hiss it, rustling through the rift,  
However loud, however low—all lift  
The groaning monster, stricken to the heart.

Lo ye, the world's concernment, for its part,  
And this, for his, will hardly interfere !  
Its businesses in blood and blaze this year  
—But wile the hour away—a pastime slight  
Till he shall step upon the platform : right !  
And now thus much is settled, cast in rough,  
Proved feasible, be counselled ! thought enough,  
Slumber, Sordello ! any day will serve :  
Were it a less digested plan ! how swerve

To-morrow ?    Meanwhile eat these sun-dried grapes  
And watch the soaring hawk there !    Life escapes  
Merrily thus.

                  He thoroughly read o'er  
His truchman Naddo's missive six times more,  
Praying him visit Mantua and supply  
A famished world.

                  The evening star was high  
When he reached Mantua, but his fame arrived  
Before him : friends applauded, foes connived,  
And Naddo looked an angel, and the rest  
Angels, and all these angels would be blest  
Supremely by a song—the thrice-renowned  
Goito manufacture.    Then he found  
(Casting about to satisfy the crowd)  
That happy vehicle, so late allowed,  
A sore annoyance ; 'twas the song's effect  
He cared for, scarce the song itself : reflect !  
In the past life what might be singing's use ?  
Just to delight his Delians, whose profuse  
Praise, not the toilsome process which procured  
That praise, enticed Apollo : dreams abjured,  
No over-leaping means for ends—take both  
For granted or take neither !    I am loth

To say the rhymes at last were Eglamor's ;  
But Naddo, chuckling, bade competitors  
Go pine ; the Master certes meant to waste  
No effort, cautiously had probed the taste  
He'd please anon : true bard, in short, disturb  
His title if they could ; nor spur nor curb,  
Fancy nor reason, wanting in him ; whence  
The staple of his verses, common sense :  
He built on Man's broad nature—gift of gifts  
That power to build ! The world contented shifts  
With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort  
Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort  
Its poet-soul—that's, after all, a freak  
(The having eyes to see and tongue to speak)  
With our herd's stupid sterling happiness  
So plainly incompatible that—yes—  
Yes—should a son of his improve the breed  
And turn out poet he were cursed indeed.  
Well, there's Goito to retire upon  
If the worst happen ; best go stoutly on  
Now ! thought Sordello.

Ay, and goes on yet !

You pother with your glossaries to get  
A notion of the Troubadour's intent—  
His Rondels, Tenzons, Virlai or Sirvent—



Much as you study arras how to twirl  
His Angelot, plaything of page and girl,  
Once ; but you surely reach, at last,—or, no !  
Never quite reach what struck the people so,  
As from the welter of their time he drew  
Its elements successively to view,  
Followed all actions backward on their course  
And catching up, unmingled at the source,  
Such a Strength, such a Weakness, added then  
A touch or two, and turned them into Men.  
Virtue took form, nor Vice refused a shape ;  
Here Heaven opened, there was Hell agape,  
As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,  
Sinner the other flared portentous by  
A greedy People : then why stop, surprised  
At his success ? The scheme was realised  
Too suddenly in one respect : a crowd  
Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud  
To speak, delicious homage to receive,  
Bianca's breath to feel upon his sleeve  
Who said, " But Anafest—why asks he less  
Than Lucio ; in your verses ? how confess  
It seemed too much but yestereve ! " The youth  
Who bade him earnestly " avow the truth,



You love Bianca, surely, from your song ;  
I knew I was unworthy !” soft or strong,  
In poured such tributes ere he had arranged  
Etherial ways to take them, sorted, changed,  
Digested : courted thus at unawares,  
In spite of his pretensions and his cares  
He caught himself shamefully hankering  
After your obvious petty joys that spring  
From real life, fain relinquish pedestal  
And condescend with pleasures—one and all  
To be renounced, no doubt ; for thus to chain  
Himself to single joys and so refrain  
From tasting their quintessence, frustrates, sure,  
His prime design ; each joy must he abjure  
Even for love of it.

He laughed : what sage  
But perishes if from his magic page  
He look because, at the first line, a proof  
’Twas heard salutes him from the cavern roof ?  
On ! Give thyself, excluding aught beside,  
To the day’s task ; compel thy slave provide  
Its utmost at the soonest ; turn the leaf  
Thoroughly conned ; these lays of thine, in brief—  
Cannot men bear, now, somewhat better ?—fly  
A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry

Of essences? the period sure has ceased  
For such : present us with ourselves, at least,  
Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates  
Made flesh : wait not !

Awhile the poet waits  
However. The first trial was enough :  
He left imagining, to try the stuff  
That held the imaged thing and, let it writhe  
Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe  
To reach the light—his Language. How he sought  
The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought  
That Language, welding words into the crude  
Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude  
Armour was hammered out, in time to be  
Approved beyond the Roman panoply  
Melted to make it, boots not. This obtained  
With some ado, no obstacle remained  
To using it ; accordingly he took  
An action with its actors, quite forsook  
Himself to live in each, returned anon  
With the result—a creature, and by one  
And one proceeded leisurely equip  
Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.  
Accomplished ! Listen Mantuans ! Fond essay !  
Piece after piece that armour broke away

Because perceptions whole, like that he sought  
To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought  
As language : Thought may take Perception's place  
But hardly co-exist in any case,  
Being its mere presentment—of the Whole  
By Parts, the Simultaneous and the Sole  
By the Successive and the Many. Lacks  
The crowd perceptions ? painfully it tacks  
Together thoughts Sordello, needing such,  
Has rent perception into : it's to clutch  
And reconstruct—his office to diffuse,  
Destroy : as difficult obtain a Muse  
In short, as be Apollo. For the rest,  
E'en if some wondrous vehicle exprest  
The whole dream, what impertinence in me  
So to express it, who myself can be  
The dream ! nor, on the other hand, are those,  
I sing to over-likely to suppose  
A higher than the highest I present  
Now, and they praise already : be content  
Both parties, rather ; they with the old verse,  
And I with the old praise—far go, fare worse !  
A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings  
The angel, sparkles off his mail, and rings

Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps,  
As might Apollo from the sudden corpse  
Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.  
He set to celebrating the exploits  
Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.

Then came

The world's revenge : their pleasure now his aim  
Merely—what was it ? Not to play the fool  
So much as learn our lesson in your school,  
Replied the world : he found that every time  
He gained applause by any given rhyme  
His auditory recognised no jot  
As he intended, and, mistaking not  
Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce  
Sufficient to believe him—All at once.  
His Will . . . conceive it caring for his Will !  
—Mantuan, the main of them, admiring still  
How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,  
Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)  
His fingers' ends ; while past the praise-tide swept  
To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept,  
The true meed for true merit—His abates  
Into a sort he most repudiates,  
And on them angrily he turns. Who were  
The Mantuan, after all, that he should care

About their recognition, ay or no ?  
In spite of the convention months ago,  
(Why blink the truth) was not he forced to help  
This same ungrateful audience, every whelp  
Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers  
With the bright band of those Goito years,  
As erst he toiled for flower or tree ? Why there  
Sate Palma ! Adelaide's funereal hair  
Ennobled the next corner. Ay, he strewed  
A fairy dust upon that multitude  
Although he feigned to take them by themselves ;  
His giants dignified those puny elves,  
Sublimed their faint applause. In short he found  
Himself still footing a delusive round,  
Remote as ever from the self-display  
He meant to compass, hampered every way  
By what he hoped assistance. Wherefore then  
Continue, make believe to find in men  
A use he found not ?

Weeks, months, years went by ;  
And, lo, Sordello vanished utterly,  
Sundered in twain ; each spectral part at strife  
With each ; one jarred against another life ;  
The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man  
Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran

Here, there ; let slip no opportunities  
Forsooth, as pitiful beside the prize  
To drop on him some no-time and acquit  
His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit)  
That waiving any compromise between  
No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen  
Beyond most methods—of incurring scoff  
From the Man-portion not to be put off  
With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme [dream,  
Though ne'er so bright ; which sauntered forth in  
Dress'd any how, nor waited mystic frames,  
Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,  
But just his sorry self ; who yet might be  
Sorrer for aught he in reality  
Achieved, so pinioned that the Poet-part,  
Fondling, in turn of fancy, Verse ; the Art  
Developing his soul a thousand ways ;  
Potent, by its assistance, to amaze  
The multitude with majesties, convince  
Each sort of nature that same nature's prince  
Accosted it : language, the makeshift, grew  
Into a bravest of expedients, too ;  
Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown  
Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone



Sufficed : while, out of dream, his day's work went  
To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent—  
So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge  
Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge  
A minute's toil that missed its due reward !  
But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard,  
John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,  
That on the sea, with open in his hand  
A bitter-sweetling of a book—was gone.

And if internal struggles to be one  
That frittered him incessantly piece-meal,  
Referred, ne'er so obliquely, to the real  
Mantuan's ! intruding ever with some call  
To action while he pondered, once for all,  
Which looked the easier effort—to pursue  
This course, still leap o'er paltry joys, yearn through  
The present ill-appreciated stage  
Of self-revelment and compel the age  
Know him ; or else, forswearing bard-craft, wake  
From out his lethargy and nobly shake  
Off timid habits of denial, mix  
With men, enjoy like men : ere he could fix  
On aught, in rushed the Mantuan's ; much they cared  
For his perplexity ! Thus unprepared,



The obvious if not only shelter lay  
In deeds the dull conventions of his day  
Prescribed the like of him : why not be glad  
'Tis settled Palma's minstrel, good or bad,  
Submits to this and that established rule ?  
Let Vidal change or any other fool  
His murrey-coloured robe for philamot  
And crop his hair ; so skin-deep, is it not,  
Such vigour ? Then, a sorrow to the heart,  
His talk ! Whatever topics they might start  
Had to be groped for in his consciousness  
Strait, and as strait delivered them by guess :  
Only obliged to ask himself, " What was,"  
A speedy answer followed, but, alas,  
One of God's large ones, tardy to condense  
Itself into a period ; answers whence  
A tangle of conclusions must be stripp'd  
At any risk ere, trim to pattern clipp'd,  
They matched rare specimens the Mantua flock  
Regaled him with, each talker from his stock  
Of sorted o'er opinions, every stage,  
Juicy in youth or desiccate with age,  
Fruits like the fig-tree's, rathe-ripe, rotten-rich,  
Sweet-sour, all tastes to take : a practice which

He too had not impossibly attained,  
Once either of those fancy-flights restrained ;  
For, at conjecture how the words appear  
To others, playing there what passes here,  
And occupied abroad by what he spurned  
At home, 'twas slipt the occasion he returned  
To seize : he'd strike that lyre adroitly—speech,  
Would but a twenty cubit plectre reach ;  
A clever hand, consummate instrument,  
Were both brought close ! each excellency went  
For nothing else. The question Naddo asked  
Had just a life-time moderately tasked  
To answer, Naddo's fashion ; more disgust  
And more ; why move his soul, since move it must  
At minutes' notice or as good it failed  
To move at all ? The end was, he retailed  
Some ready-made opinion, put to use  
This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce  
Gestures and tones—at any folly caught  
Serving to finish with, nor too much sought  
If false or true 'twas spoken ; praise and blame  
Of what he said grew pretty well the same  
—Meantime awards to meantime acts : his soul,  
Unequal to the compassing a Whole,

Saw in a tenth part less and less to strive  
 About. And as for Men in turn . . . contrive  
 Who could to take eternal interest  
 In them, so hate the worst, so love the best !  
 Though in pursuance of his passive plan  
 He hailed, decried the proper way.

As Man

So figured he ; and how as Poet ? Verse  
 Came only not to a stand-still. The worse,  
 That his poor piece of daily work to do  
 Was not sink under any rivals ; who  
 Loudly and long enough, without these qualms,  
 Tuned, from Bocafoli's stark-naked psalms,  
 To Plara's sonnets spoilt by toying with,  
 " As knops that stud some almug to the pith  
 Prickèd for gum, wry thence, and crinklèd worse  
 Than pursed-up eyelids of a river-horse  
 Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the breese"  
 Ha, ha ! Of course he might compete with these  
 But—but—

Observe a pompion-twine afloat ;  
 Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat—  
 Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,  
 The entire surface of the pool to boot.

So could I pluck a cup, put in one song  
A single sight, did not my hand, too strong,  
Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.  
How should externals satisfy my soul?  
Why that's precise the error Squarcialupe  
(Hazarded Naddo) finds ; the man can't stoop  
To sing us out, quoth he, a mere romance ;  
He'd fain do better than the best, enhance  
The subjects' rarity, work problems out  
Therewith : now you're a bard, a bard past doubt,  
And no philosopher ; why introduce  
Crotchets like these ? fine, surely, but no use  
In poetry—which still must be, to strike,  
Based upon common sense ; there's nothing like  
Appealing to our nature ! what beside  
Was your first poetry ? No tricks were tried  
In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes !  
The man, said we, tells his own joys and woes—  
We'll trust him. Would you have your songs endure ?  
Build on the human heart !—Why to be sure  
Yours is one sort of heart—but I mean theirs,  
Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares  
To build on ! Central peace, mother of strength,  
That's father of . . . nay, go yourself that length,

Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do  
When they have got their calm ! Nay, is it true  
Fire rankles at the heart of every globe ?  
Perhaps ! But these are matters one may probe  
Too deeply for poetic purposes :  
Rather select a theory that . . . yes [midway  
Laugh ! what does that prove ? . . . stations you  
And saves some little o'er-refining. Nay,  
That's rank injustice done me ! I restrict  
The poet ? Don't I hold the poet picked  
Out of a host of warriors, statesmen—did  
I tell you ? Very like ! as well you hid  
That sense of power you have ! True bards believe  
Us able to achieve what they achieve—  
That is, just nothing—in one point abide  
Profounder simpletons than all beside :  
Oh ay ! The knowledge that you are a bard  
Must constitute your prime, nay sole, reward !  
So prattled Naddo, busiest of the tribe  
Of genius-haunters—how shall I describe  
What grubs or nips, or rubs, or rips—your louse  
For love, your flea for hate, magnanimous,  
Malignant, Pappacoda, Tagliafer,  
Picking a sustenance from wear and tear

By implements it sedulous employs  
To undertake, lay down, mete out, o'er-toise  
Sordello? fifty creepers to elude  
At once! They settled stanchly; shame ensued:  
Behold the monarch of mankind succumb  
To the last fool who turned him round his thumb,  
As Naddo styled it! 'Twas not worth oppose  
The matter of a moment, gainsay those  
He aimed at getting rid of; better think  
Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink  
Back expeditiously to his safe place,  
And chew the cud—what he and what his race  
Were really, each of them. Yet even this  
Conformity was partial. He would miss  
Some point, brought into contact with them ere  
Assured in what small segment of the sphere  
Of his existence they attended him;  
Whence blunders—falsehoods rectify—a grim  
List—slur it over! How? If dreams were tried,  
His will swayed sicklily from side to side  
Nor merely neutralized his waking act  
But tended e'en in fancy to distract  
The intermediate will, the choice of means:  
He lost the art of dreaming: Mantua scenes



Supplied a baron, say, he sung before,  
Handsomely reckless, full to running o'er  
Of gallantries ; abjure the soul, content  
With body, therefore ! Scarcely had he bent  
Himself in dream thus low when matter fast  
Cried out, he found, for spirit to contrast  
And task it duly ; by advances slight,  
The simple stuff becoming composite,  
Count Lori grew Apollo—best recall  
His fancy ! Then would some rough peasant-Paul  
Like those old Ecelin confers with, glance  
His gay apparel o'er ; that countenance  
Gathered his shattered fancy into one,  
And, body clean abolished, soul alone  
Sufficed the grey Paulician : by and by  
To balance the ethereality  
Passions were needed ; foiled he sunk again.

Meanwhile the world rejoiced ('tis time explain)  
Because a sudden sickness set it free  
From Adelaide. Missing the mother bee  
Her mountain hive Romano swarmed ; at once  
A rustle-forth of daughters and of sons  
Blackened the valley. I am sick too, old,  
Half crazed I think ; what good 's the Kaiser's gold



To such an one ? God help me ! for I catch  
My children's greedy sparkling eyes at watch—  
He bears that double breastplate on, they say,  
So many minutes less than yesterday !  
Beside Monk Hilary is on his knees  
Now, sworn to kneel and pray till God shall please  
Exact a punishment for many things  
You know and some you never knew ; which brings  
To memory, Azzo's sister Beatrix  
And Richard's Giglia are my Alberic's  
And Ecelin's betrothed ; the Count himself  
Must get my Palma : Ghibellin and Guelf  
Mean to embrace each other. So began  
Romano's missive to his fighting-man  
Taurello on the Tuscan's death, away  
With Friedrich sworn to sail from Naples' bay  
Next month for Syria. Never thunder-clap  
Out of Vesuvius' mount like this mishap  
Startled him. That accursed Vicenza ! I  
Absent, and she selects this time to die !  
Ho, fellows, for Vicenza ! Half a score  
Of horses ridden dead he stood before  
Romano in his reeking spurs : too late—  
Boniface urged me, Este could not wait,

The chieftain stammered ; let me die in peace—  
Forget me ! Was it I e'er craved increase  
Of rule ? Do you and Friedrich plot your worst  
Against the Father : as you found me first  
So leave me now. Forgive me ! Palma, sure,  
Is at Goito still. Retain that lure—  
Only be pacified !

The country rung

With such a piece of news : on every tongue  
How Ecelin's great servant, congeed off,  
Had done a long day's service, so might doff  
The green and yellow to recover breath  
At Mantua, whither, since Retrude's death,  
(The girlish slip of a Sicilian bride  
From Otho's House he carried to reside  
At Mantua till the Ferrarese should pile  
A structure worthy her imperial style,  
The gardens raise, their tenantry enshrine  
She never lived to see) although his line  
Was ancient in her archives and she took  
A pride in him, that city, nor forsook  
Her child though he forsook himself and spent  
A prowess on Romano surely meant  
For his own purposes—he ne'er resorts  
If wholly satisfied (to trust reports)

With Ecelin. So forward in a trice  
Were shows to greet him. Take a friend's advice,  
Quoth Naddo to Sordello, nor be rash  
Because your rivals (nothing can abash  
Some folks) demur that we pronounced you best  
To sound the great man's welcome ; 'tis a test  
Remember ; Strojavacca looks asquint,  
The rough fat sloven ; and there's plenty hint  
Your pinions have received of late a shock—  
Out-soar them, cobswan of the silver flock !  
Sing well ! A signal wonder song's no whit  
Facilitated.

Fast the minutes flit ;  
Another day, Sordello finds, will bring  
The soldier, and he cannot choose but sing ;  
So quits, a last shift, Mantua—slow, alone :  
Out of that aching brain, a very stone,  
Song must be struck. What occupies that front ?  
Just how he was more awkward than his wont  
The night before, when Naddo, who had seen  
Taurello on his progress, praised the mien  
For dignity no crosses could affect—  
Such was a joy, and might not he detect  
A satisfaction if established joys  
Were proved imposture ? Poetry annoys

Its utmost : wherefore fret ? Verses may come  
Or keep away ! And thus he wandered, dumb  
Till evening, when he paused, thoroughly spent,  
On a blind hill-top ; down the gorge he went,  
Yielding himself up as to an embrace ;  
The moon came out ; like features of a face  
A querulous fraternity of pines,  
Sad blackthorn clumps, leafless and grovelling vines.  
Also came out, made gradually up  
The picture ; 'twas Goito's mountain-cup  
And castle. He had dropped through one defile  
He never dared explore, the Chief erewhile  
Had vanished by. Back rushed the dream, enwrapt  
Him wholly. 'Twas Apollo now they lapped  
Those mountains, not a pettish minstrel meant  
To wear his soul away in discontent  
Brooding on fortune's malice ; heart and brain  
Swelled ; he expanded to himself again  
As that thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail  
Pushing between cat's head or ibis' tail  
Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth  
—Suffered remain just as it sprung to soothe  
The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet  
Well in the chilly green-glazed minaret—

When rooted up the sunny day she died  
And flung into the common court beside  
Its parent tree. Come home, Sordello ! Soon  
Was he low muttering beneath the moon  
Of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore,  
How from his purposes maintained before  
Only resulted wailing and hot tears.  
Ah, the slim castle ! dwindled of late years,  
But more mysterious ; gone to ruin—trails  
Of vine thro' every loop-hole. Nought avails  
The night as, torch in hand, he must explore  
The maple chamber—did I say its floor  
Was made of intersecting cedar beams ?  
Worn now with gaps so large there blew cold streams  
Of air quite from the dungeon ; lay your ear  
Close and 'tis like, one after one, you hear  
In the blind darkness water-drops. The nests  
And nooks retained their long ranged vesture-chests  
Empty and smelling of the iris-root  
The Tuscan grated o'er them to recruit  
Her wasted wits. Palma was gone that day,  
Said the remaining women. Last, he lay  
Beside the Carian group reserved and still.  
The Body, the Machine for Acting Will

Had been at the commencement proved unfit ;  
That for Reflecting, Demonstrating it,  
Mankind—no fitter : was the Will Itself  
In fault ?

His forehead pressed the moonlit shelf  
Beside the youngest marble maid awhile ;  
Then, raising it, he thought, with a long smile,  
I shall be king again ! as he withdrew  
The envied scarf ; into the font he threw  
His crown.

Next day, no poet ! Wherefore ? asked  
Taurello, when the dance of Jongleurs masked  
As devils ended ; don't a song come next ?  
The master of the pageant looked perplext  
Till Naddo's whisper came to his relief ;  
His Highness knew what poets were : in brief,  
Had not the tetchy race prescriptive right  
To peevishness, caprice ? or, call it spite,  
One must receive their nature in its length  
And breadth, expect the weakness with the strength !  
So phrasing, till, his stock of phrases spent,  
The easy-natured soldier smiled assent,  
Settled his portly person, smoothed his chin,  
And nodded that the bull-chase might begin.

## BOOK THE THIRD.



AND the font took them : let our laurels lie !  
Braid moonfern now with mystic trifoly  
Because once more Goito gets, once more,  
Sordello to itself ! A dream is o'er  
And the suspended life begins anew ;  
Quiet those throbbing temples, then, subdue  
That cheek's distortion ! Nature's strict embrace,  
Putting aside the past, shall soon efface  
Its print as well—factitious humours grown  
Over the true—loves, hatreds not his own—  
And turn him pure as some forgotten vest  
Woven of painted byssus, silkiest  
Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,  
Left welter where a trireme let it slip  
I' the sea and vexed a Satrap ; so the stain  
O' the world forsakes Sordello with its pain



Its pleasure : how the tinct loosening escapes  
Cloud after cloud ! Mantua's familiar shapes  
Die, fair and foul die, fading as they flit,  
Men, women, and the pathos and the wit,  
Wise speech and foolish, deeds to smile or sigh  
For, good, bad, seemly or ignoble, die :  
The last face glances through the eglantines,  
The last voice murmurs 'twixt the blossomed vines  
This May of the Machine supplied by Thought  
To compass Self-perception idly sought  
By forcing half himself—an insane pulse  
Of a God's blood on clay it could convulse  
Never transmute—on human sights and sounds  
To watch the other half with ; irksome bounds  
It ebbs from to its source, a fountain sealed  
Forever. Better sure be unrevealed  
Than part-revealed : Sordello well or ill  
Is finished with : what further use of Will ?  
—Point in the prime idea not realized,  
An oversight, inordinately prized  
No less, and pampered with enough of each  
Delight to prove the whole above its reach.  
To need become all natures yet retain  
The law of one's own nature—to remain

Oneself, yet yearn . . . aha, that chesnut, think,  
To yearn for this first larch-bloom crisp and pink,  
With those pale fragrant tears where zephyrs staunch  
March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch !  
Will and the means to show it, great and small  
Material, spiritual, abjure them all  
Save any so distinct as to be left  
Amuse, not tempt become : and, thus bereft,  
Say, just as I am fashioned would I be !  
Nor, Moon, is it Apollo now but me  
Thou visitest to comfort and befriend ;  
Swim thou into my heart and there an end  
Since I possess thee ! nay thus shut mine eyes  
And know, quite know, by that heart's fall and rise  
If thou dost bury thee in clouds and when  
Out-standest : wherefore practise upon Men  
To make that plainer to myself ?

Slide here

Over a sweet and solitary year  
Wasted : or simply notice change in him—  
How eyes, bright with exploring once, grew dim  
As satiate with receiving. Some distress  
Occasioned, too, a sort of consciousness  
Under the imbecility ; nought kept  
That down : he slept, but was aware he slept

And frustrate so : as who brainsick made pact  
Erst with the overhanging cataract  
To deafen him, yet may distinguish now  
His own blood's measured clicking at his brow.

To finish. One declining Autumn day—  
Few birds about the heaven chill and grey,  
No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods—  
He sauntered home complacently, their moods  
According, his and Nature's. Every spark  
Of Mantua life was trodden out ; so dark  
The embers that the Troubadour who sung  
Hundreds of songs forgot, its trick the tongue,  
Its craft the brain, how either brought to pass  
Singing so e'er ; that faculty might class  
With any of Apollo's now. The year  
Began to find its early promise sere  
As well. Thus beauty vanishes ! Your stone  
Outlasts your flesh. Nature's and his youth gone,  
They left the world to you and wished you joy.  
When stopping his benevolent employ  
A presage shuddered through the welkin ; harsh  
The earth's remonstrance followed. 'Twas the marsh  
Gone of a sudden. Mincio in its place  
Laughed a broad water in next morning's face

And, where the mists broke up immense and white  
I' the steady wind, burnt like a spilth of light  
Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.

And here was Nature, bound by the same bars  
Of fate with him !

No : youth once gone is gone :

Deeds let escape are never to be done :

Leaf-fall and grass-spring for the year, but us—

Oh forfeit I unalterably thus

My chance ? nor two lives wait me, this to spend

Learning save that ? Nature has leisure mend

Mistake, occasion, knows she, will recur—

Landslip or seabreach how affects it her

With her magnificent resources ? I

Must perish once and perish utterly !

Not any strollings now at even-close

Down the field-path, Sordello, by thorn-rows

Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire

And dew, outlining the black cypress' spire

She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first

Woo her the snow-month—ah, but ere she durst

Answer 'twas April ! Linden-flower-time-long

Her eyes were on the ground ; 'tis July, strong

Now ; and because white dust-clouds overwhelm

The woodside, here or by the village elm

That holds the moon she meets you, somewhat pale,  
But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil  
And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)  
Of love—heart's love—your heart's love that endures  
Till death. Tush ! No mad mixing with the rout  
Of haggard ribalds wandering about  
The hot torchlit wine-scented island-house  
Where Friedrich holds his wickedest carouse  
Parading to the gay Palermitans,  
Soft Messinese, dusk Saracenic clans  
From Nuocera, those tall grave dazzling Norse,  
Clear-cheeked, lank-haired, toothed whiter than the  
Queens of the caves of jet stalactites [morse,  
He sent his barks to fetch through icy seas,  
The blind night seas without a saving-star,  
And here in snowy birdskin robes they are,  
Sordello, here, mollitious alcoves gilt  
Superb as Byzant-domes the devils built  
—Ah, Byzant, there again ! no chance to go  
Ever like august pleasant Dandolo,  
Worshipping hearts about him for a wall,  
Conducted, blind eyes, hundred years and all,  
Through vanquished Byzant to have noted him  
What pillar, marble massive, sardius slim,

'Twere fittest we transport to Venice' Square—  
Flattered and promised life to touch them there  
Soon, by his fervid sons of senators !  
No more lives, deaths, loves, hatreds, peaces, wars—  
Ah, fragments of a Whole ordained to be !  
Points in the life I waited ! what are ye  
But roundels of a ladder which appeared  
Awhile the very platform it was reared  
To lift me on—that Happiness I find  
Proofs of my faith in, even in the blind  
Instinct which bade forego you all unless  
Ye led me past yourselves ? Ay, Happiness  
Awaited me ; the way life should be used  
Was to acquire, and deeds like you conducted  
To teach it by a self-revelment (deemed  
That very use too long). Whatever seemed  
Progress to that was Pleasure ; aught that stayed  
Me reaching it—No Pleasure. I have laid  
The roundels down ; I climb not ; still aloft  
The platform stretches ! Bliss strong and soft  
I dared not entertain elude me ; yet  
Never of what they promised could I get  
A glimpse till now ! The common sort, the crowd,  
Exist, perceive ; with Being are endowed,

However slight, distinct from what they See,  
However bounded : Happiness must be  
To feed the first by gleanings from the last,  
Attain its qualities, and slow or fast  
Become what one beholds ; such peace-in-strife  
By transmutation is the Use of Life,  
The Alien turning Native to the soul  
Or body—which instructs me ; I am whole  
There and demand a Palma ; had the world  
Been from my soul to a like distance hurled  
'Twere Happiness to make it one with me—  
Whereas I must, ere I begin to Be,  
Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend  
In spirit now ; and this done, what's to blend  
With ? Nought is Alien here—my Will  
Owns it already ; yet can turn it still  
Less Native, since my Means to correspond  
With Will are so unworthy 'twas my bond  
To tread the very ones that tantalize  
Me now into a grave, never to rise—  
I die then ! Will the rest agree to die ?  
Next Age or no ? Shall its Sordello try  
Clue after clue and catch at last the clue  
I miss, that's underneath my finger too,



Twice, thrice a day, perhaps,—some yearning traced  
Deeper, some petty consequence embraced  
Closer ! Why fled I Mantua then ? Complained  
So much my Will was fettered, yet remained  
Content within a tether half the range  
I could assign it ?—able to exchange  
My ignorance, I felt, for knowledge, and  
Idle because I could thus understand—  
Could e'en have penetrated to its core  
Our mortal mystery, and yet forbore,  
Preferred elaborating in the dark  
My casual stuff, by any wretched spark  
Born of my predecessors, tho' one stroke  
Of mine had brought the flame forth ! Mantua's yoke,  
My minstrel's-trade, was to behold mankind,  
And my own matter—just to bring my mind  
Behold, just extricate, for my acquist,  
Each object suffered stifle in the mist  
Convention, hazard, blindness could impose  
In their relation to myself.

He rose.

The level wind carried above the firs  
Clouds, the irrevocable travellers,  
Onward.

Pushed thus into a drowsy copse,  
Arms twine about my neck, each eyelid drops  
Under a humid finger ; while there fleets  
Outside the screen a pageant time repeats  
Never again ! To be deposed—immured  
Clandestinely—still petted, still assured  
To govern were fatiguing work—the Sight  
Fleeting meanwhile ! 'Tis noontide—wreak ere night  
Somehow one's will upon it rather ! Slake  
This thirst somehow, the poorest impress take  
That serves ! A blasted bud displays you, torn,  
Faint rudiments of the full flower unborn ;  
But who divines what petal coats o'erclasp  
Of the bulb dormant in the Mummy's grasp  
Taurello sent . . .

Taurello ? Palma sent  
Your Trouvere (Naddo interposing leant  
Over the lost bard's shoulder) and believe  
You cannot more reluctantly conceive  
Than I pronounce her message : we depart  
Together : what avail a poet's heart  
Verona and her gauds ? five blades of grass  
Suffice him. News ? Why, where your marish was,  
On its mud-banks smoke rises after smoke  
I' the valley like a spout of hell new-broke.

Oh, the world's tidings ! little thanks, I guess,  
For them. The father of our Patroness  
Playing Taurello an astounding trick  
Parts between Ecelin and Alberic  
His wealth and goes into a convent : both  
Wed Guelfs : the Count and Palma plighted troth  
A week since at Verona : and she wants  
You doubtless to contrive the marriage-chants  
Ere Richard storms Ferrara. Your response  
To Palma ? Wherefore jest ? Depart at once ?  
A good resolve ! In truth I hardly hoped  
So prompt an acquiescence. Have you groped  
Out wisdom in the wilds here ?—Thoughts may be  
Over-poetical for poetry ?  
Pearl-white you minstrels liken Palma's neck,  
And yet what spoils an orient like some speck  
Of genuine white turning its own white grey ?  
You take me ? Curse the cicales !

One more day—

One eve—appears Verona ! Many a group,  
(You mind) instructed of the osprey's swoop  
On l nx and ounce, was gathering—Christendom  
Sure to receive, whate'er it might be, from  
The evening's purpose cheer or detriment  
Since Friedrich only waited some event

Like this of Ghibellins establishing  
Themselves within Ferrara, ere, as King  
Of Lombardy, he'd glad descend there, wage  
Old warfare with the Pontiff, disengage  
His barons from the burghers, and restore  
The rule of Charlemagne broken of yore  
By Hildebrand. That eve-long each by each  
Sordello sate and Palma : little speech  
At first in that dim closet, face with face  
Despite the tumult in the market place  
Exchanging quick low laughs : now would gush  
Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,  
A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise—  
But for the most part their two histories  
Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.  
And so the night flew on with its alarms  
Till in burst one of Palma's retinue ;  
Now Lady, gasped he. Then arose the two  
And leaned into Verona's air dead still.  
A balcony lay black beneath until  
Out 'mid a gush of torchfire grey-haired men  
Came on it and harangued the people : then  
Sea-like that people surging to and fro  
Shouted, Hale forth the Carroch—trumpets, ho,

A flourish ! run it in the ancient grooves—  
Back from the bell ! Hammer ! that whom behooves  
May hear the League is up ! Peal ! learn, who list  
Verona means not be the first break tryst  
To-morrow with the League.

Enough. Now turn—  
Over the Eastern cypresses : discern  
You any beacon set a-glimmer ?

Rang  
The air with shouts that overpowered the clang  
Of the incessant carroch even. Haste—  
The Candle's at the gate-way ! ere it waste  
Each soldier stands beside, armed fit to march  
With Tiso Sampier thro' that Eastern arch !  
Ferrara's succoured, Palma !

Once again  
They sate together ; some strange thing in train  
To say, so difficult was Palma's place  
In taking, with a coy fastidious grace  
Like the bird's flutter ere it fix and feed ;  
But when she felt she held her friend indeed  
Safe, she threw back her curls, began implant  
Her lessons ; telling of another want  
Goito's quiet nourished than his own ;  
Palma—to serve, as him—be served, alone

Importing ; Agnes' milk so neutralised  
The blood of Ecelin. Nor be surprised  
If, while Sordello nature captive led,  
In dream was Palma wholly subjected  
To some out-soul which dawned not though she pined  
Delaying still (pursued she) heart and mind  
To live : how dared I let expand the force  
Within me till some out-soul whose resource  
It grew for should direct it ? Every law  
Of life, its fitnesses and every flaw,  
Must that determine whose corporeal shape  
Would be no other than the prime escape  
And revelation to me of a Will  
Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable  
Above except the point I was to know  
Shone that myself, my powers, might overflow  
So far, so much ; as now it signified  
Which earthly shape it henceforth chose to guide  
Me by, whose lip selected to declare  
Its oracles, what fleshly garb would wear :  
—The first of intimations, whom to love ;  
The next, how love him. And that orb above  
The castle-covert and the mountain-close  
Slow in appearing, if beneath arose



Cravings, aversions, and our green precinct  
Took pride in me at unawares distinct  
With this or that endowment, how repress,  
At once such jetting power shrunk to the rest !  
Was I to have a chance touch spoil me, leave  
My spirit thence unfitted to receive  
The consummating spell ?—that spell so near  
Moreover : waits he not the waking year ?  
His almond-blossoms must be honey-ripe  
By this ; to welcome him fresh runnels stripe  
The thawed ravines ; because of him the wind  
Walks like a herald. I shall surely find  
Him now !

And chief that earnest April morn  
Of Richard's Love-court was it time, so worn  
And white her cheek, so idly her blood beat,  
Sitting that morn beside the Lady's feet  
And saying as she prompted ; till outburst  
One face from all the faces—not then first  
She knew it ; where in maple-chamber glooms,  
Crowned with what sanguine-heart pomegranate  
Advanced it ever ? Men's acknowledgment [blooms  
Sanctioned her own : 'twas taken, Palma's bent,  
She said.



And day by day the Tuscan dumb  
Sat scheming, scheming ; Ecelin would come  
Gaunt, scared, Cesano baffles me, he'd say :  
Better I fought it out my father's way !  
Strangle Ferrara in its drowning flats  
And you and your Taurello yonder—what's  
Romano's business there ? An hour's concern  
To cure the froward Chief ! induced return  
Much heartened from those overmeaning eyes,  
Wound up to persevere, his enterprise  
Marked out anew, its exigent of wit  
Apportioned, she at liberty to sit  
And scheme against the next emergence, I—  
To covet what I deemed their sprite, made fly  
Or fold the wing—to con your horoscope  
For leave command those steely shafts shoot ope  
Or straight assuage their blinding eagerness  
To blank smooth snow : what semblance of success  
To any of my plans for making you  
Romano's lord ? That Chief—her children too—  
There Salinguerra would obstruct me sheer,  
And the insuperable Tuscan here  
Stayed me ! But one wild eve that Lady died  
In her lone chamber : only I beside :

Taurello far at Naples, and my sire  
At Padua, Ecelin away in ire  
With Alberic : she held me thus—a clutch  
To make our spirits as our bodies touch—  
And so began flinging the past up, heaps  
Of uncouth treasure from their sunless sleeps  
Within her soul ; deeds rose along with dreams,  
Fragments of many miserable schemes,  
Secrets, more secrets, then—no, not the last—  
'Mongst others, like a casual trick o' the past,  
How . . . ay, she told me, gathering her face  
—That face of hers into one arch-grimace  
To die with . . .

Friend, 'tis gone ! but not the fear  
Of that fell laughing, heard as now I hear.  
Nor faltered voice, nor seemed herself grow weak,  
When i' the midst abrupt she ceased to speak  
—Dead, as to serve a purpose, mark, for in  
Rushed o' the very instant Ecelin  
(How summoned who divines ?) looking as if  
Part understood he why his mate lay stiff  
Already in my arms for, Girl, how must  
I manage Este in the matter thrust  
Upon me, how unravel their bad coil ?  
Since (he declared) 'tis on your brow—a soil

Like hers there ! then said in a breath he lacked  
No counsel after all, had signed no pact  
With devils, nor was treason here or there,  
Goito or Vicenza, his affair :

He 'd bury it in Adelaide's deep grave  
And begin life afresh, nor, either, slave  
For any Friedrich's or Taurello's sake !  
What bootéd him to meddle or to make  
In Lombardy ? 'Twas afterward I knew  
The meaning of his promise to undo  
All she had done—why marriages were made,  
New friendships entered on, old followers paid  
In curses for their pains, people's amaze  
At height, when passing out by Gate St. Blaise  
He stopped short in Vicenza, bent his head  
Over a friar's neck, had vowed, he said,  
Long since, nigh thirty years, because his wife  
And child were saved there, to bestow his life  
On God, his gettings on the Church.

Exiled

Within Goito, still that dream beguiled  
Her days and nights ; 'twas found the orb she sought  
To serve, those glimpses came of Fomalhaut  
No other : how then serve it ?—authorise  
Him and Romano mingle destinies ?

And straight Romano's angel stood beside  
Her who had else been Boniface's bride,  
For Salinguerra 'twas, the neck low bent,  
The voice lightened to music as he meant  
To learn not teach me how Romano waxed,  
Wherefore it waned, and why if I relaxed  
My grasp (think, I!) would drop a thing effete,  
Frayed by itself, unequal to complete  
The course and counting every step astray  
A gain so much. Romano every way  
Stable, a House now—why this starting back  
Into the very outset of its track?  
This recent patching-principle allied  
Our House with other Houses—what beside  
Concerned the apparition, yon grim Knight  
Who followed Conrad hither in such plight  
His utmost wealth was reckoned in his steed?  
For Ecelo, that prowler, was decreed  
A task in the beginning hazardous  
To him as ever task can be to us,  
But did the weather-beaten thief despair  
When first our crystal cincture of warm air,  
That binds the Trivisan as its spice-belt  
(Crusaders say) the tract where Jesus dwelt,

Furtive he pierced and Este was to face—  
Despaired Saponian Strength of Lombard Grace?  
Said he for making surer aught made sure,  
Maturing what already was mature?  
No; his heart prompted Ecelo, Confront  
Este, inspect yourself. What's nature? Wont.  
Discard three-parts your nature and adopt  
The rest as an advantage! Old Strength propped  
The earliest of Podestas among  
The Vincentines, no less than, while there sprung  
His Palace up in Padua like a threat,  
Their noblest spied a Grace unnoticed yet  
In Conrad's crew. Thus far the object gained,  
Romano was established; has remained—  
For are you not Italian, truly peer  
With Este? Azzo better soothes it ear  
Than Alberic? or is this lion's-crine  
From over-mount (this yellow hair of mine)  
So weak a graft on Agnes Este's stock?  
(Thus went he on with something of a mock)  
Wherefore recoil then from the very fate  
Conceded you, refuse to imitate  
Your model farther? Este long since left  
Being mere Este: as a blade its heft,

Este requires the Pope to further him :  
And you, the Kaiser : whom your father's whim  
Foregoes or, better, never shall forego  
If Palma dares pursue what Ecelo  
Commenced but Ecelin desists from : just  
As Adelaide of Susa could intrust  
Her donative (that's Piedmont to the Pope,  
The Alpine-pass for him to shut or ope  
'Twixt France and Italy) to the superb  
Matilda's perfecting,—lest aught disturb  
Our Adelaide's great counter-project for  
Giving her Trentine to the Emperor  
And passage here from Germany, shall you  
Take it, my slender plodding talent, too—  
Urged me Taurello with his half-smile.

He

As Patron of the scattered family  
Conveyed her to his Mantua, kept in bruit  
Azzo's alliances and Richard's suit  
Until, the Kaiser excommunicate,  
Nothing remains, Taurello said, but wait  
Some rash procedure : Palma was the link,  
As Agnes' child, between us, and they shrink  
From losing Palma : judge if we advance  
Your father's method your inheritance !



That day she was betrothed to Boniface  
At Padua by Taurello's self, took place  
The outrage of the Ferrarese: again,  
That day she sought Verona with the train  
Agreed for, by Taurello's policy  
Convicting Richard of the fault, since she  
Was present to annul or to confirm,  
Richard, whose patience had outstayed its term,  
Quitted Verona for the siege.

And now

What glory may engird Sordello's brow  
For this? A month since Oliero sunk  
All Ecelin that was into a Monk;  
But how could Salinguerra so forget  
His liege of thirty summers as grudge yet  
One effort to recover him? He sent  
Forthwith the tidings of the Town's event  
To Oliero, adding, he, despite  
The recent folly, recognised his right  
To order such proceedings: should he wring  
Its uttermost advantage out, or fling  
This chance away? If not him, who was Head  
Now of the House? Through me that missive sped;  
My father's answer will by me return.  
Behold! For him, he writes, no more concern



With strife than for his children with the plots  
Of Friedrich. Old engagements out he blots  
For aye : Taurello shall no more subserve  
Nor Ecelin impose. Lest this unnerve  
Him therefore at this juncture, slack his grip  
Of Richard, suffer the occasion slip,  
I, in his sons' default (who, mating with  
Este, forsake Romano as the frith  
Its mainsea for the firmland that makes head  
Against) I stand, Romano ; in their stead  
Assume the station they desert, and give  
Still, as the Kaiser's Representative,  
Taurello licence he demands. Midnight—  
Morning—by noon to-morrow, making light  
Of the League's issue, we, in some gay weed  
Like yours disguised together, may precede  
The arbitrators to Ferrara ; reach  
Him, let Taurello's noble accents teach  
The rest ! then say if I have misconceived  
Your destiny, too readily believed  
The Kaiser's cause your own.

And Palma's fled.

Though no affirmative disturbs the head  
A dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er  
Like the alighted planet Pollux wore,

Until, morn breaking, he resolves to be  
Gate-vein of this heart's blood of Lombardy,  
Soul to their body—have their aggregate  
Of souls and bodies, and so conquer fate  
Though he should live, a centre of disgust  
Even, apart, core of the outward crust  
He vivifies, assimilates. For thus  
Bring I Sordello to the rapturous  
Exclaim at the crowd's cry, because one round  
Of life was quite accomplished and he found  
Not only that a soul, howe'er its might,  
Is insufficient to its own delight  
Both in corporeal organs and in skill  
By means of such to body forth its Will—  
And, after, insufficient to apprise  
Men of that Will, oblige them recognise  
The Hid by the Revealed—but that, the last  
Nor lightest of the struggles overpast,  
His Will, bade abdicate, which would not void  
The throne, might sit there, suffer be enjoyed  
The same a varied and divine array  
Incapable of homage the first way  
Nor fit to render incidentally  
Tribute connived at, taken by the by,

In joys : and if, thus warranted rescind  
The ignominious exile of mankind  
Whose proper service, ascertained intact  
As yet (by Him to be themselves made act,  
Not watch Sordello acting each of them)  
Was to secure—if the true diadem  
Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank  
The wisdom of that golden Palma, thank  
Verona's Lady in her Citadel  
Founded by Gaulish Brennus legends tell—  
And truly when she left him the sun reared  
A head like the first clamberer's that peered  
A-top the Capitol, his face on flame  
With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came.  
Nor slight too much my rhymes—"that spring,  
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead [dispread,  
Like an escape of angels?" Rather say  
My transcendental platan ! mounting gay  
(An archimage so courts a novice-queen)  
With tremulous silvered trunk, whence branches sheen  
Laugh out, thick foliaged next, a-shiver soon  
With coloured buds, then glowing like the moon  
One mild flame, last a pause, a burst, and all  
Her ivory limbs are smothered by a fall,

Bloom-flinders and fruit-sparkles and leaf-dust,  
Ending the weird work prosecuted just  
For her amusement ; he decrepit, stark,  
Dozes ; her uncontrolled delight may mark  
Apart—

Yet not so, surely never so !

Only as good my soul were suffered go  
O'er the lagune : forth fare thee, put aside  
Entrance thy synod, as a God may glide  
Out of the world he fills and leave it mute  
A myriad ages as we men compute,  
Returning into it without a break  
I' the consciousness ! They sleep, and I awake  
O'er the lagune.

Sordello said once, note

In just such songs as Eglamor, say, wrote  
With heart and soul and strength, for he believed  
Himself achieving all to be achieved  
By singer—in such songs you find alone  
Completeness, judge the song and singer One  
And either's purpose answered, his in it  
Or its in him : while from true works (to wit  
Sordello's dream-performances that will  
Be never more than dream) escapes there still

Some proof the singer's proper life's beneath  
The life his song exhibits, this a sheath  
To that ; a passion and a knowledge far  
Transcending these, majestic as they are,  
Smoulder ; his lay was but an episode  
In the bard's life. Which evidence you owed  
To some slight weariness, a looking-off  
Or start-away, the childish skit or scoff  
In " Charlemagne," for instance, dreamed divine  
In every point except one restive line  
(Those daughters !)—what significance may lurk  
In that ? My life commenced before that work,  
Continues after it, as on I fare  
With no more stopping possibly, no care  
To jot down (says the bard) the why and how  
And where and when of life as I do now :  
But shall I cease to live for that ? Alas  
For you ! who sigh, when shall it come to pass  
We read that story, when will he compress  
The future years, his whole life's business,  
Into another lay which that one flout,  
How'er inopportune it be, lets out  
Engrosses him already while professed  
To meditate with us eternal rest ?

Strike sail, slip cable ! here the galley 's moored  
For once, the awning's stretched, the poles assured ;  
Noontide above ; except the wave's crisp dash,  
Or buzz of colibri, or tortoise' splash,  
The margin's silent ; out with every spoil  
Made in our tracking, coil by mighty coil,  
This serpent of a river to his head  
I' the midst ! Admire each treasure as we spread  
The turf to help us tell our history  
Arigh : give ear then, gentles, and descry  
The groves of giant rushes how they grew  
Like demons' endlong tresses we sailed through,  
How mountains yawned, forests to give us vent  
Opened, each doleful side, yet on we went  
Till . . . may that beetle (shake your cap) attest  
The springing of a land-wind from the West !  
Wherefore ? Ah yes, we frolic it to-day :  
To-morrow, and the pageant's moved away  
Down to the poorest tent-pole : we and you  
Part company : no other may pursue  
Eastward your voyage, be informed what fate  
Intends, if triumph or decline await  
The tempter of the everlasting steppe.

I sung this on an empty palace-step



At Venice : why should I break off, nor sit  
Longer upon my step, exhaust the fit  
England gave birth to ? Who's adorable  
Enough reclaim a —— no Sordello's Will  
Alack !—be queen to me ? That Bassanese  
Busied among her smoking fruit-boats ? These  
Perhaps from our delicious Asolo  
Who twinkle, pigeons o'er the portico  
Not prettier, bind late lilies into sheaves  
To deck the bridge-side chapel, dropping leaves  
Soiled by their own loose gold-meal ? Ah, beneath  
The cool arch stoops she, brownest-cheek ! Her wreath  
Endures a month—a half month—if I make  
A queen of her, continue for her sake  
Sordello's story ? Nay, that Paduan girl  
Splashes with barer legs where a live whirl  
In the dead black Giudecca proves sea-weed  
Drifting has sucked down three, four, all indeed  
Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post  
For gondolas.

You sad disheveled ghost  
That pluck at me and point, are you advised  
I breathe ? Let stay those girls (e'en her disguised  
—Jewels in the locks that love no crownnet like  
Their native field-buds and the green wheat spike,



So fair !—Who left this end of June's turmoil,  
Shook off, as might a lily its gold soil,  
Pomp, save a foolish gem or two, and free  
Came join the peasants o'er the kissing sea.)  
Look they too happy, too tricked out ? Confess  
You have so niggard stock of happiness  
To share that, do one's uttermost, dear wretch,  
One labours ineffectually stretch  
It o'er you so that mother, children, both  
May equitably flaunt the sumpter-cloth !  
No : tear the robe yet farther : be content  
With seeing some few score pre-eminent  
Through shreds of it, acknowledged happy wights,  
Engrossing what should furnish all, by rights—  
(At home we dizen scholars, chiefs and kings,  
But in this magic weather hardly clings  
The old garb gracefully : Venice, a type  
Of Life, 'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,  
As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt nought and nought :  
'Tis Venice, and 'tis Life—as good you sought  
To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone,  
Or stay me thrid her cross canals alone,  
As hinder Life what seems the single good  
Sole purpose, one thing to be understood

Of Life)—best, be they Peasants, be they Queens,  
Take them, I say, made happy any means,  
Parade them for the common credit, vouch  
A luckless residue we send to crouch  
In corners out of sight was just as framed  
For happiness, its portion might have claimed  
And so, could we concede that portion, stalked  
Fastuous as any—such my project, baulked  
Already ; hardly venture I adjust  
A lappet when I find you ! To mistrust  
Me ! nor unreasonably. You, no doubt,  
Have the true knack of tiring suitors out  
With those thin lips on tremble, lashless eyes  
Inveterately tear-shot—there, be wise  
Mistress of mine, there, there, as if I meant  
You insult ! Shall your friend (not slave) be shent  
For speaking home ? Beside care-bit erased  
Broken-up beauties ever took my taste  
Supremely, and I love you more, far more  
That she I looked should foot Life's temple-floor—  
Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where  
A whisper came, Seek others, since thy care  
Is found, a life's provision ; if a race  
Should be thy mistress, and into one face.

The many faces crowd? Ah, had I, judge,  
Or no, your secret? Rough apparel—grudge  
All ornaments save tag or tassel worn  
To hint we are not thoroughly forlorn—  
Slouch bonnet, unloop mantle, careless go  
Alone (that's saddest but it must be so)  
Through Venice, sing now and now glance aside,  
Aught desultory or undignified,  
And, ravishingest lady, will you pass  
Or not each formidable group, the mass  
Before the Basilike (that feast gone by,  
God's day, the great June Corpus Domini)  
And wistfully foregoing proper men  
Come timid up to me for alms? And then  
The luxury to hesitate, feign do  
Some unexampled grace, when whom but you  
Dare I bestow your own upon? And hear  
Me out before you say it is to sneer  
I call you ravishing, for I regret  
Little that she, whose early foot was set  
Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,  
Now i' the silent city, seems to fall  
Towards me—no wreath, only a lip's unrest  
To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed

Dry of their tears upon my bosom : strange  
Such sad chance should produce in thee such change,  
My love ! warped men, souls, bodies ! yet God spoke  
Of right-hand foot and eye—selects our yoke  
Sordello ! as your poetship may find :  
So sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind  
Their foolish talk ; we'll manage reinstate  
The matter ; ask moreover, when they prate  
Of evil men past hope, don't each contrive  
Despite the evil you abuse to live ?  
Keeping, each losel, thro' a maze of lies,  
His own conceit of truth ? to which he hies  
By obscure tortuous windings, if you will,  
But to himself not inaccessible ;  
He sees it, and his lies are for the crowd  
Who cannot see ; some fancied right allowed  
His vilest wrong, empowered the fellow clutch  
One pleasure from the multitude of such  
Denied him : then assert, all men appear  
To think all better than themselves, by here  
Trusting a crowd they wrong ; but really, say,  
All men think all men stupider than they  
Since save themselves no other comprehends  
The complicated scheme to make amends,

—Evil, the scheme by which, thro' Ignorance  
Good labours to exist. A slight advance  
Merely to find the sickness you die through  
And nought beside : but if one can't eschew  
One's portion in the common lot, at least  
One can avoid an ignorance increased  
Tenfold by dealing out hint after hint  
How nought is like dispensing without stint  
The water of life—so easy to dispense  
Beside, when one has probed the centre whence  
Commotion's born—could tell you of it all  
—Meantime, just meditate my madrigal  
O' the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe !  
What, dullard ? we and you in smothery chafe  
Babes, baldheads, stumbled thus far into Zin  
The Horrid, getting neither out nor in,  
A hungry sun above us, sands among  
Our throats, each dromedary lolls a tongue,  
Each camel churns a sick and frothy chap,  
And you, 'twixt tales of Potiphar's mishap  
And sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke,  
Remark you wonder any one needs choak  
With founts about ! Potsherd him, Gibeonites,  
While awkwardly enough your Moses smites

The rock though he forego his Promised Land,  
Thereby, have Satan claim his carcass, and  
Dance, forsooth, Metaphysic Poet . . . ah  
Mark ye the dim first ooziings? Meribah!  
And quaffing at the fount my courage gained  
Recall—not that I prompt ye—who explained . . .  
Presumptuous! interrupts one. You not I  
'Tis, Brother, marvel at and magnify  
Mine office: office, quotha? can we get  
To the beginning of the office yet?  
What do we here? simply experiment  
Each on the other's power and its intent  
When elsewhere tasked, if this of mine were trucked  
For thine to either's profit,—watch construct,  
In short, an engine: with a finished one  
What it can do is all, nought how 'tis done;  
But this of ours yet in probation, dusk  
A kernel of strange wheelwork thro' its husk  
Grows into shape by quarters and by halves;  
Remark this tooth's spring, wonder what that valve's  
Fall bodes, presume each faculty's device,  
Make out each other more or less precise—  
The scope of the whole engine's to be proved—  
We die: which means to say the whole's removed,



The Minster minded that ! in heaps the dust  
Lay every where : that town, the Minster's trust,  
Held Plara ; who, its denizen, bade hail  
In twice twelve sonnets, Naddo, Tempe's vale.

Exact the town, the minster and the street !

As all mirth triumphs, sadness means defeat :  
Lust triumphs and is gay, Love's triumphed o'er  
And sad : but Lucio's sad : I said before  
Love's sad, not Lucio ; one who loves may be  
As gay his love has leave to hope, as he  
Downcast his lusts' desire escapes the springe :  
'Tis of the mood itself I speak, what tinge  
Determines it, else colourless, or mirth,  
Or melancholy, as from Heaven or Earth.

Ay, that's the variation's gist ! Indeed ?  
Thus far advanced in safety then, proceed !  
And having seen too what I saw, be bold  
Enough encounter what I do behold  
(That's sure) but you must take on trust ! Attack  
The use and purpose of such sights ! Alack,  
Not so unwisely hastes the crowd dispense  
On Salinguerras praise in preference  
To the Sordellos : men of action these !  
Who seeing just as little as you please



Yet turn that little to account ; engage  
With, do not gaze at ; carry on a stage  
The work o' the world, not merely make report  
The work existed ere their time—In short,  
When at some future no-time a brave band  
Sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand  
In heaven, my brother ! Meanwhile where's the hurt  
To keep the Makers-see on the alert  
At whose defection mortals stare aghast  
As though Heaven's bounteous windows were slammed  
Incontinent ? whereas all you beneath [fast  
Should scowl at, curse them, bruise lips, break their  
Who ply the pullies for neglecting you : [teeth  
And therefore have I moulded, made anew  
A Man, delivered to be turned and tried,  
Be angry with or pleased at. On your side  
Have ye times, places, actors of your own ?  
Try them upon Sordello once full-grown,  
And then—ah then ! If Hercules first parched  
His foot in Egypt only to be marched  
A sacrifice for Jove with pomp to suit,  
What chance have I ? The demigod was mute  
Till at the altar, where time out of mind  
Such guests became oblations, chaplets twined

His forehead long enough, and he began  
Slaying the slayers, nor escaped a man—  
Take not affront, my gentle audience ! whom  
No Hercules shall make his hecatomb  
Believe, nor from his brows your chaplet rend—  
That's your kind suffrage, yours, nay, yours, my friend  
Whose great verse blares unintermittent on  
Like any trumpeter at Marathon,  
He'll testify who when Plataeas grew scant  
Put up with Ætna for a stimulant !  
And well too, I acknowledged, as it loomed  
Over the Midland sea that morn, presumed  
All day, demolished by the blazing West  
At eve, while towards it tilting cloudlets prest  
Like Persian ships for Salamis. Friend, wear  
A crest proud as desert while I declare  
Had I a flawless ruby fit to wring  
A tear its colour from that painted king  
To lose, I would, for that one smile which went  
To my heart, fling it in the sea content  
Wearing your verse in place, an amulet  
Sovereign against low-thoughtedness and fret !  
My English Eyebright, if you are not glad  
That, as I stopped my task awhile, the sad

Disheveled form wherein I put mankind  
To come at times and keep my pact in mind  
Renewed me,—hear no crickets in the hedge  
Nor let a glowworm spot the river's edge  
At home, and may the summer showers gush  
Without a warning from the missel thrush !  
For, Eyebright, what I sing's the fate of such  
As find our common nature (overmuch  
Despised because restricted and unfit  
To bear the burthen they impose on it)  
Cling when they would discard it ; craving strength  
To leap from the allotted world, at length  
'Tis left—they floundering without a term  
Each a God's germ, but doomed remain a germ  
In unexpanded infancy, assure  
Yourself, nor misconceive my portraiture  
Nor undervalue its adornments quaint !  
What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint :  
Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,  
Then say if you condemn me or acquit.  
John the Beloved, banished Antioch  
For Patmos, bade collectively his flock  
Farewell but set apart the closing eve  
To comfort some his exile most would grieve

He knew: a touching spectacle, that house  
In motion to receive him! Xanthus' spouse  
You missed, made panther's meat a month since; but  
Xanthus himself (for 'twas his nephew shut  
'Twixt boards and sawn asunder) Polycarp,  
Soft Charicle next year no wheel could warp  
To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest  
Were ranged; thro' whom the grey disciple prest  
Busily blessing right and left, just stopt  
To pat one infant's curls the hangman cropt  
Soon after, reached the portal; on its hinge  
The door turns and he enters—what deep twinge  
Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix  
Whereon? How like some spectral candlestick's  
Branch the disciple's arms! Dead swooned he, woke  
Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp heart-broke  
Get thee behind me Satan! have I toiled  
To no more purpose? is the gospel foiled  
Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,  
Pourtrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—  
Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled  
To see the—the—the Devil domiciled?  
Whereto sobbed Xanthus, Father, 'tis yourself  
Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf

Went to procure against to-morrow's loss,  
And that's no twy-prong but a pastoral cross  
You're painted with! The puckered brows unfold—  
And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

## BOOK THE FOURTH.



MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case ;  
The lady-city, for whose sole embrace  
Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms  
A brawny mischief to the fragile charms  
Each tugged for—one discovering to twist  
Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist  
Secured a point of vantage—one, how best  
He'd parry that by planting in her breast  
His elbow-spike—both parties too intent  
For noticing, howe'er the battle went,  
Its conqueror would have a corpse to kiss.  
May Boniface be duly damned for this !  
Howled some old Ghibellin as up he turned,  
From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned  
His house, a little scull with dazzling teeth :  
A boon, sweet Christ—let Salinguerra seethe



In hell for ever, Christ, and let myself  
Be there to laugh at him ! moaned some young Guelf  
Stumbling upon a shrivelled hand nailed fast  
To the charred lintel of the doorway last  
His father stood within to bid him speed.  
The thoroughfares looked overrun with weed  
—Docks, quitchgrass, loathly mallows no man plants.

The stranger none of its inhabitants  
Crept out of doors to taste fresh air again,  
Or ask the purpose of a sumptuous train  
Admitted on a morning ; every town  
Of the East League was come by envoy down  
To treat for Richard's ransom : here you saw  
The Vicentine, here snowy oxen draw  
The Paduan carroch, its vermilion cross  
On its white field : a-tiptoe o'er the fosse  
Looked Legate Montelungo wistfully  
After the flock of steeples he might spy  
In Este's time, gone (doubts he) long ago  
To mend the ramparts—sure the laggards know  
The Pope's as good as here ! They paced the streets  
More soberly. At last, Taurello greets  
The League, announced a pursuivant,—will match  
Its courtesy, and labours to despatch

## BOOK THE FOURTH.



MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case ;  
The lady-city, for whose sole embrace  
Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms  
A brawny mischief to the fragile charms  
Each tugged for—one discovering to twist  
Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist  
Secured a point of vantage—one, how best  
He'd parry that by planting in her breast  
His elbow-spike—both parties too intent  
For noticing, howe'er the battle went,  
Its conqueror would have a corpse to kiss.  
May Boniface be duly damned for this !  
Howled some old Ghibellin as up he turned,  
From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned  
His house, a little scull with dazzling teeth :  
A boon, sweet Christ—let Salinguerra seethe

In hell for ever, Christ, and let myself  
Be there to laugh at him ! moaned some young Guelf  
Stumbling upon a shrivelled hand nailed fast  
To the charred lintel of the doorway last  
His father stood within to bid him speed.  
The thoroughfares looked overrun with weed  
—Docks, quitchgrass, loathly mallows no man plants.

The stranger none of its inhabitants  
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Or ask the purpose of a sumptuous train  
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More soberly. At last, Taurello greets  
The League, announced a pursuivant,—will match  
Its courtesy, and labours to despatch

At earliest Tito, Friedrich's Pretor, sent  
On pressing matters from his post at Trent  
With Mainard Count of Tyrol,—simply waits  
Their going to receive the delegates.  
Tito! Our delegates exchanged a glance,  
And, keeping the main way, admired askance  
The lazy engines of outlandish birth  
Couched like a king each on its bank of earth—  
Arbalist, manganel, and catapult;  
While stationed by, as waiting a result,  
Lean silent gangs of mercenaries ceased  
Working to watch the strangers—this, at least,  
Were better spared; he scarce presumes gainsay  
The League's decision! Get our friend away  
And profit for the future: how else teach  
Azzo 'tis not so safe within claw's reach  
Till Salinguerra's final gasp be blown?  
Those mere convulsive scratches find the bone  
—Who bade him bloody the spent osprey's nare?

The carrochs halted in the public square.  
Pennons of every blazon once a-flaunt,  
Men prattled, freelier that the crested gaunt  
White ostrich with a horse-shoe in her beak  
Was missing; whosoever chose might speak

*Ecelin* boldly out: so, *Ecelin*  
Needed his wife to swallow half the sin  
And sickens by himself: the devil's whelp  
He styles his son dwindles away, no help  
From conserves, your fine triple-curved froth  
Of virgin's blood, your Venice viper-broth—  
Eh? Jubilate! Tush! no little word  
You utter here that's not distinctly heard  
At Oliero: he was absent sick  
When we besieged Bassano—who i' the thick  
O' the work perceived the progress Azzo made  
Like *Ecelin*? through his witch *Adelaide*  
Who managed it so well that night by night  
At their bed-foot stood up a soldier-sprite  
First fresh, pale by-and-by without a wound,  
And when he came with eyes filmed as in swoond  
They knew the place was taken—Ominous  
Your Ghibellin should get what cautelous  
Old Redbeard sought from Azzo's sire to wrench  
Vainly; St. George contrived his town a trench  
O' the marshes, an impermeable bar;  
Young *Ecelin* is meant the tutelar  
Of Padua rather; veins embrace upon  
His hand like Brenta and Bacchiglion . . .

What now ? The founts ! God's bread, touch not a  
A crawling hell of carrion—every tank [plank !  
Choke full ! found out just now to Cino's cost—  
The same who gave Taurello's side for lost,  
And, making no account of fortune's freaks,  
Refused to budge from Padua then, but sneaks  
Back now with Concorezzi—'faith ! they drag  
Their carroch to San Vital, plant the flag  
On his own Palace so adroitly razed  
He knew it not ; a sort of Guelf folk gazed  
And laughed apart ; Cino disliked their air—  
Must pluck up spirit, show he does not care—  
Seats himself on the tank's edge—will begin  
To hum, *za za, Cavalier Ecelin*—  
A silence ; he gets warmer, clinks to chime,  
Now both feet plough the ground, deeper each time,  
At last, *za za*, and up with a fierce kick  
Comes his own mother's face caught by the thick  
Grey hair about his spur !

Which means, they lift  
The covering Taurello made a shift  
To stretch upon the truth ; as well avoid  
Further disclosures ; leave them thus employed.  
Our dropping Autumn morning clears apace,  
And poor Ferrara puts a softened face

On her misfortunes, save one spot—this tall  
Huge foursquare line of red brick garden-wall  
Bastioned within by trees of every sort  
On three sides, slender, spreading, long and short,  
(Each grew as it contrived, the poplar ramped,  
The fig-tree reared itself,) but stark and cramped,  
Made fools of ; whence upon the very edge,  
Running 'twixt trunk and trunk to smooth one ledge  
Of shade, are shrubs inserted, warp and woof,  
Which smother up that variance. Scale the roof  
Of solid tops and o'er the slope you slide  
Down to a grassy space level and wide,  
Here and there dotted with a tree, but trees  
Of rarer leaf, each foreigner at ease,  
Set by itself ; and in the centre spreads,  
Born upon three uneasy leopards' heads,  
A laver, broad and shallow, one bright spirt  
Of water bubbles in : the walls begirt  
With trees leave off on either hand : pursue  
Your path along a wondrous avenue  
The walls abut on, heaped of gleamy stone,  
With aloes leering everywhere, grey-grown  
From many a Moorish summer ; how they wind  
Out of the fissures ! likelier to bind



The building than those rusted cramps which drop  
Already in the eating sunshine. Stop  
Yon fleeting shapes above there ! Ah, the pride  
Or else despair of the whole country-side—  
A range of statues, swarming o'er with wasps,  
God, goddess, woman, man, your Greek rough-rasps  
In crumbling Naples marble ! meant to look  
Like those Messina marbles Constance took  
Delight in, or Taurello's self conveyed  
To Mantua for his mistress, Adelaide,  
A certain font with caryatides  
Since cloistered at Goito ; only, these  
Are up and doing, not abashed, a troop  
Able to right themselves—who see you, stoop  
O' the instant after you their arms ! unplucked  
By this or that you pass, for they conduct  
To terrace raised on terrace, and, between,  
Creatures of brighter mould and braver mien  
Than any yet, the choicest of the Isle  
No doubt ; here, left a sullen breathing-while,  
Up-gathered on himself the Fighter stood  
For his last fight, and, wiping treacherous blood  
Out of the eyelids just held ope beneath  
Those shading fingers in their iron sheath,

Steadied his strengths amid the buz and stir  
Of a dusk hideous amphitheatre  
At the announcement of his over-match  
To wind the day's diversion up, despatch  
Their pertinacious friend: while, limbs one heap,  
The Slave, no breath in her round mouth, watched leap  
Dart after dart forth as her hero's car  
Clove dizzily the solid of the war  
—Let coil about his knees for pride in him.  
We reach the farthest terrace and the grim  
San Pietro Palace stops us.

Such the state

Of Salinguerra's plan to emulate  
Sicilian marvels that his girlish wife  
Retrude still might lead her ancient life  
In her new home—whereat enlarged so much  
Neighbours upon the novel princely touch  
He took who here imprisons Boniface.  
Here must the Envoys come to sue for grace;  
And here, emerging from the labyrinth  
Below, two minstrels pause beside the plinth  
Of the door-pillar.

One had really left

Verona for the cornfields (a poor theft

From the morass) where Este's camp was made,  
The Envoys' march, the Legate's cavalcade—  
Looked cursorily o'er, but scarce as when,  
Eager for cause to stand aloof from men  
At every point save the fantastic tie  
Acknowledged in his boyish sophistry,  
He made account of such. A crowd ; he meant  
To task the whole of it ; each part's intent  
Concerned him therefore, and the more he pried  
The less became Sordello satisfied  
With his own figure at the moment. Sought  
He respite from his task ? descried he aught  
Novel in the anticipated sight  
Of all those livers upon all delight ?  
A phalanx as of myriad points combined  
Whereby he still had imaged that mankind  
His youth was passed in dreams of rivalling,  
His age—in plans to show at least the thing  
So dreamed, but now he hastened to impress .  
With his own will, effect a happiness  
From theirs, supply a body to his soul  
Thence, and become eventually whole  
With them as he had hoped to be without—  
Made these the mankind he was mad about ?

Because a few of them were notable  
Must all be figured worthy note? As well  
Expect to find Taurello's triple line  
Of trees a single and prodigious pine.  
Real pines rose here and there, but, close among,  
Thrust into and mixed up with pines, a throng  
Of shrubs you saw, a nameless common sort  
O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report,  
Fast hurried into corners, or at best  
Admitted to be fancied like the rest.  
Reckon that morning's proper chiefs; how few!  
And yet the people grew, the people grew,  
Grew ever, as with many there indeed,  
More left behind and most who should succeed,  
Simply in virtue of their faces, eyes,  
Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,  
Were veritably mingled with, made great  
Those chiefs: no overlooking Mainard's state  
Nor Concorezzi's station, but instead  
Of stopping there, each dwindled to be head  
Of infinite and absent Tyrolese  
Or Paduans; startling too the more that these  
Seemed passive and disposed of, uncared for,  
Yet doubtless on the whole (quoth Eglamor)

Smiling—for if a wealthy man decays  
And out of store of such must wear all days  
One tattered suit alike in sun and shade,  
'Tis commonly some tarnished fine brocade  
Fit for a feast-night's flourish and no more ;  
Nor otherwise poor Misery from her store  
Of looks is fain upgather, keep unfurled  
For common wear as she goes through the world  
The faint remainder of some worn-out smile  
Meant for a feast-night's service merely. While  
Crowd upon crowd rose on Sordello thus,—  
Crowds no way interfering to discuss  
Much less dispute life's joys with one employed  
In envying them, or, if they enjoyed,  
There lingered somewhat indefinable  
In every look and tone, the mirth as well  
As woe, that fixed at once his estimate  
Of the result, their good or bad estate,—  
Old memories flocked but with a new effect :  
And the new body, ere he could suspect,  
Cohered, mankind and he were really fused,  
The new self seemed impatient to be used  
By him, but utterly another way  
To that anticipated : strange to say,

They were too much below him, more in thrall  
Than he, the adjunct than the principal.  
What bootèd scattered brilliances? the mind  
Of any number he might hope to bind  
And stamp with his own thought, howe'er august,  
If all the rest should grovel in the dust?  
No: first a mighty equilibrium sure  
To be established, privilege procure  
For them himself had long possessed! he felt  
An error, an exceeding error melt—  
While he was occupied with Mantuan chants  
Behoved him think of men and of their wants  
Such as he now distinguished every side,  
As his own want that might be satisfied,  
And, after that, of wondrous qualities  
Of his own soul demanding exercise,  
And like demand it longer: nor a claim  
On their part, nor was virtue in the aim  
At serving them on his, but, past retrieve,  
He in their toils felt with them, nor could leave,  
Wonder that in the eagerness to rule,  
Impress his will upon them, he the fool  
Had never entertained the obvious thought  
This last of his arrangements would be fraught

With good to them as well, and he should be  
Rejoiced thereat ; and if, as formerly,  
He sighed the merry time of life must fleet,  
'Twas deeper now, for could the crowds repeat  
Their poor experiences ? His hand that shook  
Was twice to be deplored. The Legate, look !  
With eyes, like fresh-blown thrush-eggs on a thread,  
Faint-blue and loosely floating in his head,  
Large tongue, moist open mouth ; and this long while  
That owner of the idiotic smile  
Serves them ! He fortunately saw in time  
His fault however, and the office prime  
Includes the secondary—best accept  
Both offices ; Taurello its adept  
Could teach him the preparatory one,  
And how to do what he had fancied done  
Long previously, ere take the greater task.  
How render then these people happy ? ask  
The people's friends : for there must be one good,  
One way to it—the Cause ! he understood  
The meaning now of Palma ; else why are  
The great ado, the trouble wide and far,  
These Guelfs and Ghibellins, the Lombard's hope  
Or its despair ! 'twixt Emperor or Pope



The confused shifting sort of Eden tale—  
Of hardihood recurring still to fail—  
That foreign interloping fiend, this free  
And native overbrooding Deity—  
Yet a dire fascination o'er the palms  
His presence ruined troubling thorough calms  
Of Paradise—or, on the other hand,  
The Pontiff, as your Kaisers understand,  
That, snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,  
With lulling eye breaks in the noon profound  
Some saving tree—who but the Kaiser drest  
As the dislodging angel of the pest  
Then? yet that pest bedropt, flat head, full fold,  
With coruscating dower of dyes; behold  
The secret, so to speak, and master-spring  
Of the whole contest! which of them shall bring  
Men good—perchance the most good—ay, it may  
Be that; the question is which knows the way.

And hereupon Count Mainard strutted past  
Out of San Pietro; never looked the last  
Of archers, slingers; and our friend began  
To recollect strange modes of serving man—  
Arbalist, catapult, brake, manganel,  
And more: this way of theirs may, who can tell,

Need perfecting, said he : all's better solved  
At once : Taurello 'twas the task devolved  
On late—confront Taurello !

And at last  
They did confront him. Scarcely an hour past  
When forth Sordello came, older by years  
Than at his entry. Unexampled fears  
Oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute  
And deaf, like some fresh-mutilated brute,  
Into Ferrara—not the empty town  
That morning witnessed : he went up and down  
Streets whence the veil was stripped shred after shred,  
So that in place of huddling with their dead  
Indoors to answer Salinguerra's ends,  
Its folk made shift to crawl and sit like friends  
With any one. A woman gave him choice  
Of her two daughters, the infantile voice  
Or dimpled knee, for half a chain his throat  
Was clasped with ; but an archer knew the coat—  
Its blue cross and eight lilies, bade beware  
One dogging him in concert with the pair  
Though thrumming on the sleeve that hid his knife.  
Night set in early, autumn dews fell rife,  
And fires were kindled while the Leaguer's mass  
Began at every carroch—he must pass

Between that kneeling people : presently  
The carroch of Verona caught his eye  
With purple trappings ; silently he bent  
Over its fire, when voices violent  
Began, Affirm not whom the youth was like  
That, striking from the porch, I did not strike  
Again ; I too have chesnut hair ; my kin  
Hate Azzo and stand up for Ecelin ;  
Here, minstrel, drive bad thoughts away ; sing ; take  
My glove for guerdon ! and for that man's sake  
He turned : A song of Eglamor's ! scarce named,  
When, Our Sordello's, rather ! all exclaimed ;  
Is not Sordello famousest for rhyme ?  
He had been happy to deny, this time ;  
Profess as heretofore the aching head,  
The failing heart ; suspect that in his stead  
Some true Apollo had the charge of them,  
Was champion to reward or to condemn  
So his intolerable risk might shift  
Or share itself ; but Naddo's precious gift  
Of gifts returned, be certain ! at the close—  
I made that, said he to a youth who rose  
As if to hear : 'twas Palma through the band  
Conducted him in silence by the hand.

Back now for Salinguerra. Tito of Trent  
Gave place, remember, to the pair ; who went  
In turn at Montelungo's visit—one  
After the other are they come and gone.  
A drear vast presence-chamber roughly set  
In order for this morning's use ; you met  
The grim black twy-necked eagle, coarsely blacked  
With ochre on the naked walls, nor lacked  
There green and yellow tokens either side ;  
But the new symbol Tito brought had tried  
The Legate's patience—nay, if Palma knew  
What Salinguerra almost meant to do  
Until the sight of her restored his lip  
A certain half-smile three months' chieftainship  
Had banished ? Afterward the Legate found  
No change in him, nor asked what badge he wound  
And unwound carelessly ! Now sate the Chief  
Silent as when our couple left whose brief  
Encounter wrought so opportune effect  
In thoughts he summoned not, nor would reject—  
Though time, if ever, 'twas to pause now—fix  
On any sort of ending : wiles and tricks  
Exhausted, judge ! his charge, the crazy town,  
Just managed to be hindered crashing down—

His last sound troops ranged—care observed to post  
His last of the maimed soldiers innermost—  
So much was plain enough, but somehow struck  
Him not before : and now with this strange luck  
Of Tito's news, rewarding his address  
So well, what thought he of? How the success  
With Friedrich's rescript there would either hush  
Ecelin's fiercest scruple up, or flush  
Young Ecelin's white cheek, or, last, exempt  
Himself from telling what there was to tempt?  
No : that this minstrel was Romano's last  
Servant—himself the first ! Could he contrast  
The whole ! that minstrel's thirty autumns spent  
In doing nought, his notablest event  
This morning's journey hither, as we told—  
Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,  
A stammering awkward youth (scarce dared he raise  
His eye before that magisterial gaze)  
—And Salinguerra with his fears and hopes  
Of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes,  
Cares and contrivances, yet you would say  
A youth 'twas nonchalantly looked away,  
Through the embrasure northward o'er the sick  
Expostulating trees—so agile quick

And graceful turned the head on the broad chest  
Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest,  
Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire  
Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire  
Of steel, that head let see the comely brown  
Large massive locks discoloured as a crown  
Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where  
A sharp white line divided clean the hair ;  
Glossy above, glossy below, it swept  
Curling and fine about a brow thus kept  
Calm, laid coat upon coat, marble and sound :  
This was the mystic mark the Tuscan found,  
Mused of, turned over books about. Square-faced,  
No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased  
In hollows filled with many a shade and streak  
Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek ;  
Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed  
A lip supremely perfect else—unwarmed,  
Unwidened, less or more ; indifferent  
Whether on trees or men his thoughts were bent—  
Thoughts rarely, after all, in trim and train  
As now : a period was fulfilled again ;  
Such in a series made his life, compressed  
In each, one story serving for the rest—



Therefore he smiled. Beyond stretched garden-grounds  
Where late the adversary, breaking bounds,  
Procured him an occasion That above,  
That eagle, testified he could improve  
Effectually ; the Kaiser's symbol lay  
Beside his rescript, a new badge by way  
Of baldric ; while another thing that marred  
Alike emprise, achievement and reward,  
Ecelin's missive was conspicuous too.

What a past life those flying thoughts pursue !  
As his no name in Mantua half so old ;  
But at Ferrara, where his sires enrolled  
It latterly, the Adelardi spared  
Few means to rival them : both factions shared  
Ferrara, so that, counted out, 't would yield  
A product very like the city's shield,  
Half black and white, or Ghibelin and Guelf,  
As after Salinguerra styled himself  
And Este who, till Marchesalla died  
—Last of the Adelardi, never tried  
His fortune there ; but Marchesalla's child  
Transmits (can Blacks and Whites be reconciled  
And young Taurello wed Linguetta) wealth  
And sway to a sole grasp : each treats by stealth



Already : when the Guelfs, the Ravennese  
Arrive, assault the Pietro quarter, seize  
Linguetta, and are gone ! Our first dismay  
Abated somewhat, hurries down to lay  
The after indignation Boniface,  
No meaner spokesman : Learn the full disgrace  
Averted ere you blame us—wont to rate  
Your Salinguerra, and sole potentate  
That might have been, 'mongst Este's valvassors—  
Ay, Azzo's—who, not privy to, abhors  
Our step—but we were zealous. Azzo's then  
To do with ! Straight a meeting of old men :  
The Lombard Eagle of the azure sphere  
With Italy to build in, builds he here ?  
This deemed—the other owned upon advice—  
A third reflected on the matter twice—  
In fine, young Salinguerra's staunchest friends  
Talked of the townsmen making him amends,  
Gave him a goshawk, and affirmed there was  
Rare sport, one morning, over the morass  
A mile or so. He sauntered through the plain,  
Was restless, fell to thinking, turned again  
In time for Azzo's entry with the bride ;  
Count Boniface rode smirking at his side ;

There's half Ferrara with her, whispers flew,  
And all Ancona ! If the stripling knew !

Anon the stripling was in Sicily  
Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance ; he  
Was gracious nor his guest incapable ;  
Each understood the other. So it fell,  
One Spring, when Azzo, thoroughly at ease,  
Had near forgotten what precise degrees  
He crept by into such a downy seat,  
Over the Count trudged in a special heat .  
To bid him of God's love dislodge from each  
Of Salinguerra's Palaces ; a breach  
Might yawn else not so readily to shut,  
For who was just arrived at Mantua but  
The youngster, sword to thigh, tuft upon chin,  
With tokens for Celano, Ecelin,  
Pistore and the like ! Next news : no whit  
Do any of Ferrara's domes befit  
His wife of Heinrich's very blood : a band  
Of foreigners assemble, understand  
Garden-constructing, level and surround,  
Build up and bury in. A last news crowned  
The consternation : since his infant's birth  
He only waits they end his wondrous girth

Of trees that link San Pietro with Tomà  
To visit us. When, as its Podestà  
Regaled him at Vicenza, Este, there  
With Boniface beforehand, each aware  
Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled  
A party which abetted him, but yelled  
Too hastily. The burning and the flight,  
And how Taurello, occupied that night  
With Ecelin, lost wife and son, were told :  
—Not how he bore the blow, retained his hold,  
Got friends safe through, left enemies the worst  
O' the fray, and hardly seemed to care at first—  
But afterward you heard not constantly  
Of Salinguerra's House so sure to be !  
Though Azzo simply gained by the event  
A shifting of his plagues—this one content  
To fall behind the other and estrange,  
You will not say, his nature, but so change  
That in Romano sought he wife and child,  
And for Romano's sake was reconciled  
To losing individual life, deep sunk,  
A very pollard mortised in a trunk  
Which Arabs out of wantonness contrive  
Shall dwindle that the alien stock may thrive

Till forth that vine-palm feathers to the root  
And red drops moisten them its arid fruit.  
Once set on Adelaide, the subtle mate  
And wholly at his beck, to emulate  
The Churches valiant women deed for deed,  
To paragon her namesake, win the meed  
Of its Matilda,—and they overbore  
The rest of Lombardy—not as before  
By an instinctive truculence, but patched  
The Kaiser's strategy until it matched  
The Pontiff's, sought old ends by novel means :  
Only, Romano Salinguerra screens.  
Heinrich was somewhat of the tardiest  
To comprehend, nor Philip acquiesced  
At once in the arrangement ; reasoned, plied  
His friend with offers of another bride,  
A statelier function—fruitlessly : 'tis plain  
Taurello's somehow one to let remain  
Obscure ; and Otho, free to judge of both,  
—Ecelin the unready, harsh and loth,  
And this more plausible and facile wight  
With every point a-sparkle—chose the right,  
Admiring how his predecessors harped  
On the wrong man: thus, quoth he, wits are warped

By outsides ! Carelessly, withal, his life  
Suffered its many turns of peace and strife  
In many lands—you hardly could surprise  
A man who shamed Sordello (recognise)  
In this as much beside, that, unconcerned  
What qualities are natural or earned,  
With no ideal of graces, as they came  
He took them, singularly well the same—  
Speaking a dozen languages because  
Your Greek eludes you, leave the least of flaws  
In contracts, while, through Arab lore, deter  
Who may the Tuscan, once Jove trined for her,  
From Friedrich's path ! Friedrich, whose pilgrimage  
The same man puts aside, whom he 'll engage  
To leave next year John Brienne in the lurch,  
And see Bassano for Saint Francis' church  
—Profound on Guido the Bolognian's piece  
That, if you lend him credit, rivals Greece—  
Angels, with aureoles like golden quoits  
Pitched home, applauding Ecelin's exploits  
In Painimrie. He strung the angelot ;  
Made rhymes thereto ; for prowess, clove he not  
Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper ? why  
Detail you thus a varied mastery

But that Taurello, ever on the watch  
For men, to read their hearts and thereby catch  
Their capabilities and purposes,  
Displayed himself so far as displayed these :  
While our Sordello only cared to know  
About men as a means for him to show  
Himself, and men were much or little worth  
According as they kept in or drew forth  
That self ; the other's choicest instruments  
Surmised him shallow. Meantime malecontents  
Dropped off, town after town grew wiser ; how  
Change the world's face ? said people ; as 'tis now  
It has been, will be ever : very fine  
Subjecting things profane to things divine  
In talk : this contumacy will fatigue  
The vigilance of Este and the League,  
Observe ! accordingly, their basement sapped,  
Azzo and Boniface were soon entrapped  
By Ponte Alto, and in one month's space  
Slept at Verona : either left a brace  
Of sons—so three years after, either's pair  
Lost Guglielm and Aldobrand its heir :  
Azzo remained and Richard—all the stay  
Of Este and St. Boniface, at bay



As 'twere ; when either Ecelin grew old  
Or his brain altered—not the proper mould  
For new appliances—his old palm stock  
Endured no influx of strange strengths : he'd rock  
As in a drunkenness, or chuckle low  
As proud of the completeness of his woe,  
Then weep—real tears ! Now make some mad  
On Este, heedless of the lesson taught [onslaught  
So painfully—now cringe, sue peace, but peace  
At price of all advantage ; therefore cease  
The fortunes of Romano ! Up at last  
Rose Este and Romano sank as fast.  
And men remarked this sort of peace and war  
Commenced while Salinguerra was afar :  
And every friend besought him, but in vain,  
To wait his old adherent, call again  
Taurello : not he—who had daughters, sons,  
Could plot himself, nor needed any one's  
Advice. 'Twas Adelaide's remaining staunch  
Prevented his destruction root and branch  
Forthwith ; Goito green above her, gay  
He made alliances, gave lands away  
To whom it pleased accept them, and withdrew  
For ever from the world. Taurello, who



Was summoned to the convent, then refused  
A word,—however patient, thus abused,  
At Este's mercy through his imbecile  
Ally, was fain dismiss the foolish smile,  
And a few movements of the happier sort  
Changed matters, put himself in men's report  
As heretofore ; he had to fight, beside,  
And that became him ever. So in pride  
And flushing of this kind of second youth  
He dealt a good-will blow : Este in truth  
Was prone—and you remembered, somewhat late,  
A laughing old outrageous stifled hate  
He bore that Este—how it would outbreak  
At times spite of disguise, like an earthquake  
In sunny weather—as that noted day  
When with his hundred friends he offered slay  
Azzo before the Kaiser's face : and how  
On Azzo's calm refusal to allow  
A liegeman's challenge straight he too was calmed :  
His hate, no doubt, would bear to lie embalmed,  
Bricked up, the moody Pharaoh, to survive  
All intermediate crumblings, be alive  
At earth's catastrophe—'twas Este's crash  
Not Azzo's he demanded, so no rash

Procedure ! Este's true antagonist  
Rose out of Ecelin : all voices whist,  
Each glance was sharpened, wit predicted. He  
'Twas leaned in the embrasure presently,  
Amused with his own efforts, now, to trace  
With his steel-sheathed forefinger Friedrich's face  
I' the dust : and as the trees waved sere, his smile  
Deepened, and words expressed its thought erewhile.

Ay, fairly housed at last, my old compeer ?  
That we should stick together all the year  
I kept Verona !—How old Boniface,  
Old Azzo caught us in its market-place,  
He by that pillar, I this pillar, each  
In mid swing, more than fury of his speech,  
Egging our rabble on to disavow  
Allegiance to the Marquis—Bacchus, how  
They caught us ! Ecelin must turn their drudge ;  
Nor, if released, will Salinguerra grudge  
Paying arrears of tribute due long since—  
Bacchus ! My man, could promise then, nor wince,  
The bones-and-muscles ! sound of wind and limb,  
Spoke he the set excuse I framed for him ;  
And now he sits me, slaving and mute,  
Intent on chafing each starved purple foot

Benumbed past aching with the altar slab—  
Will no vein throb there when some monk shall blab  
Spitefully to the circle of bald scalps  
“Friedrich’s affirmed to be our side the Alps”  
—Eh, brother Lactance, brother Anaclet?  
Sworn to abjure the world and the world’s fret,  
God’s own now? drop the dormitory bar,  
Enfold the scanty grey serge scapular  
Twice o’er the cowl to muffle memories out—  
So! but the midnight whisper turns a shout,  
Eyes wink, mouths open, pulses circulate  
In the stone walls: the past, the world you hate  
Is with you, ambush, open field—or see  
The surging flame—they fire Vicenza—glee!  
Follow, let Pilio and Bernardi chafe—  
Bring up the Mantuans—through San Biagio—safe!  
Ah, the mad people waken? Ah, they writhe  
And reach you? if they block the gate—no tithe  
Can pass—keep back you Bassanese! the edge,  
Use the edge—shear, thrust, hew, melt down the  
wedge,  
Let out the black of those black upturned eyes!  
Hell—are they sprinkling fire too? the blood fries  
And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear  
Those upturned faces choaking with despair.

Brave ! Slidder through the reeking gate—how now !  
You six had charge of her ? And then the vow  
Comes, and the foam spirts, hair 's plucked, till one shriek  
(I hear it) and you fling—you cannot speak—  
Your gold-flowered basnet to a man who haled  
The Adelaide he dared scarce view unveiled  
This morn, naked across the fire : how crown  
The archer that exhausted lays you down  
Your infant, smiling at the flame, and dies ?  
While one, while mine . . .

Bacchus ! I think there lies  
More than one corpse there (and he paced the room)  
—Another cinder somewhere—'twas my doom  
Beside, my doom : if Adelaide is dead  
I am the same, this Azzo lives instead  
Of that to me, and we pull any how  
Este into a heap—the matter's now  
At the true juncture slipping us so oft ;  
Ay, Heinrich died and Otho, please you, doffed  
His crown at such a juncture : let but hold  
Our Friedrich's purpose, let this chain enfold  
The neck of . . . who but this same Ecelin ?  
That must recoil when the best days begin—  
Recoil ? that's nought ; so the recoiler leaves  
His name for me to fight with, no one grieves !

But he must interfere, forsooth, unlock  
His cloister to become my stumbling-block  
Just as of old ! Ay, ay, there 'tis again—  
The land's inevitable Head—explain  
The reverences that subject us ! Count  
These Ecelins now ! not to say as fount,  
Originating power of thought, from twelve  
That drop i' the trenches they joined hands to delve  
Six shall surpass him, but . . . why, men must twine  
Somehow with something ! Ecelin's a fine  
Clear name ! 'Twere simpler, doubtless, twine with me  
At once : our cloistered friend's capacity  
Was of a sort ! I had to share myself  
In fifty portions, like an o'ertasked elf  
That's forced illume in fifty points the vast  
Rare vapour he's environed by : at last  
My strengths, though sorely frittered, e'en converge  
And crown—no, Bacchus, they have yet to urge  
The man be crowned !

That aloe, an he durst,  
Would climb ! just such a bloated sprawler first  
I noted in Messina's castle court  
The day I came, and Heinrich asked in sport  
If I would pledge my faith to win him back  
His right in Lombardy ; for, once bid pack

Marauders, he continued, in my stead  
You rule, Taurello ! and upon this head  
Laid the silk glove of Constance—I see her  
Too, mantled head to foot in miniver,  
Retrude following !

I am absolved

From further toil : the empery devolved  
On me, 'twas Tito's word : and think, to lay  
For once my plan, pursue my plan my way,  
Prompt nobody, and render an account  
Taurello to Taurello ! nay, I mount  
To Friedrich—he conceives the post I kept,  
Who did true service, able or inept,  
Who's worthy guerdon, Ecelin or I :  
Me guerdoned, counsel follows ; would he vie  
With the Pope really ? Azzo, Boniface  
Compose a right-arm Hohenstauffen's race  
Must break ere govern Lombardy ; I point  
How easy 'twere to twist, once out of joint,  
The socket from the bone ; my Azzo's stare  
Meanwhile ! for I, this idle strap to wear,  
Shall—fret myself abundantly, what end  
To serve ? There's left me twenty years to spend  
—How better than my old way ? Had I one  
Who laboured overthrow my work—a son



Hatching with Azzo superb treachery,  
To root my pines up and then poison me,  
Suppose—'twere worth while frustrate that ! Beside  
Another life 's ordained me : the world's tide  
Rolls, and what hope of parting from the press  
Of waves, a single wave through weariness  
That's gently led aside, laid upon shore ?  
My life must be lived out in foam and roar,  
No question. Fifty years the province held  
Taurello ; troubles raised, and troubles quelled,  
He in the midst—who leaves this quaint stone place,  
Those trees a year or two, then, not a trace  
Of him ! How obtain hold, fetter men's tongues  
Like that Sordello with his foolish songs—  
To which, despite our bustle, he is linked ?  
—Flowers one may teaze, that never seem extinct ;  
Ay, that patch, surely, green as ever, where  
I set Her Moorish lentisk, by the stair,  
To overawe the aloes—and we trod  
Those flowers, how call you such ? into the sod ;  
A stately foreigner—and worlds of pain  
To make it thrive, arrest rough winds—all vain !  
It would decline—these would not be destroyed—  
And now, where is it—where can you avoid



The flowers ? I frighten children twenty years  
Longer !—which way, too, Ecelin appears  
To thwart me, for his son's besotted youth  
Gives promise of the proper tiger-tooth,  
They prattle, at Vicenza ! Fate, fate, fate,  
My fine Taurello ! go you, promulgate  
Friedrich's decree, and here's shall aggrandise  
Young Ecelin—our Prefect's badge ! a prize  
Too precious, certainly.

How now ? Compete  
With my old comrade ? shuffle from their seat  
His children ? Paltry dealing ! don't I know  
Ecelin ? now, I think, and years ago !  
What 's changed—the weakness ? did not I compound  
For that, and undertake preserve him sound  
Despite it ? Say Taurello 's hankering  
After the boy's preferment—this play-thing  
To carry, Bacchus ! And he laughed.

Remark

Why schemes wherein cold-blooded men embark  
Prosper, when your enthusiastic sort  
Fails : for these last are ever stopping short—  
(Much to be done—so little they can do !)  
The careless tribe see nothing to pursue

Should they desist ; meantime their scheme succeeds.

Thoughts were caprices in the course of deeds  
Methodic with Taurello ; so he turned,  
Enough amused by fancies fairly earned  
Of Este's horror-struck submitted neck,  
And Boniface completely at his beck,  
To his own petty but immediate doubt  
If he could pacify the League without  
Conceding Richard ; just to this was brought  
That interval of vain discursive thought !  
As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit  
Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot,  
Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black  
Enormous water current, his sole track  
To his own tribe again, where he is King ;  
And laughs because he guesses, numbering  
The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch  
Of the first lizard wrested from its couch  
Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips  
To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,  
And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert blast)  
That he has reached its boundary, at last  
May breathe ;—thinks o'er enchantments of the South  
Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth

And nails, and hair ; but, these enchantments tried  
In fancy, puts them soberly aside  
For truth, cool projects, a return with friends,  
The likelihood of winning wild amends  
Ere long ; thinks that, takes comfort silently,  
And from the river's brink his wrongs and he,  
Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon  
Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon.

Midnight : the watcher nodded on his spear,  
Since clouds dispersing left a passage clear,  
If any meagre and discoloured moon  
Should venture forth ; and such was peering soon  
Above the harassed city—her close lanes  
Closer, not half so tapering her fanes,  
As though she shrunk into herself to keep  
What little life was saved more safely. Heap  
By heap the watch-fires mouldered, and beside  
The blackest spoke Sordello and replied  
Palma with none to listen. 'Tis your Cause—  
What makes a Ghibellin ? There should be laws—  
(Remember how my youth escaped ! I trust  
To you for manhood, Palma ; tell me just  
As any child)—laws secretly at work  
Explaining this. Assure me good may lurk

Under the bad ; my multitude has part  
In your designs, their welfare is at heart  
With Salinguerra, to their interest  
Refer the deeds he dwelt on—so divest  
Our conference of much that scared me : why  
Affect that heartless tone to Tito ? I  
Esteemed myself, yes, in my inmost mind  
This morn, a recreant to that wide mankind  
O'erlooked till now : why boast my spirit's force,  
—That force denied its object ? why divorce  
These, then admire my spirit's flight the same,  
As though it bore a burden, which could tame  
No pinion, from dead void to living space ?  
—That orb consigned to chaos and disgrace,  
Why vaunt complacently my frantic dance,  
Making a feat's facilities enhance  
The marvel ? But I front Taurello, one  
Of happier fate, and what I should have done  
He does ; the multitude aye paramount  
With him, its making progress may account  
For his abiding still : when . . . but you heard  
His talk with Tito—the excuse preferred  
For burning those five hostages—and broached  
By way of blind, as you and I approached,  
I do believe.

She spoke : then he, My thought  
Plainer expressed ! All Friedrich's profit—nought  
Of these meantime, of conquests to achieve  
For them, of wretchednesses to relieve  
While profiting that Friedrich. Azzo, too,  
Supports a cause : what is it ? Guelfs pursue  
Their ends by means like yours, or better ?

When

The Guelfs were shown alike, men ranged with men,  
And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze,  
Morn broke : once more, Sordello, meet its gaze  
Proudly—the people's charge against thee fails  
In every point, while either party quails !  
These are the busy ones—be silent thou !  
Two parties take the world up, and allow  
No third, yet have one principle, subsist  
By the same method ; whoso shall enlist  
With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.  
So there is one less quarrel to compose  
'Twixt us : the Guelf's, the Ghibellin's to curse—  
I have done nothing, but both sides do worse  
Than nothing ; nay to me, forgotten, reft  
Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left  
The notion of a service—ha ? What lured  
Me here, what mighty aim was I assured

Moved Salinguerra? If a Cause remained  
Intact, distinct from these, and fate ordained,  
For all the past, that Cause for me?

One pressed

Before them here, a watcher, to suggest  
The subject for a ballad: he must know  
The tale of the dead worthy, long ago  
Consul of Rome—that 's long ago for us,  
Minstrels and bowmen, idly squabbling thus  
In the world's corners—but too late, no doubt,  
For the brave time he sought to bring about  
—Not know Crescentius Nomentanus? Then  
He cast about for terms to tell him, when  
Sordello disavowed it, how they used  
Whenever their Superior introduced  
A novice to the Brotherhood (for I  
Was just a brown-sleeve brother, merrily  
Appointed too, quoth he, till Innocent  
Bade me relinquish, to my small content,  
My wife or my brown sleeves) out some one spoke  
Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke  
The edict issued after his demise  
That blotted memory, and effigies,  
All out except a floating power, a name  
Including, tending to produce the same

Great act. Rome, dead, forgotten, lived at least  
Within that man, though to a vulgar priest  
And a vile stranger, fit to be a slave  
Of Rome's, Pope John, King Otho, fortune gave  
The rule there : but Crescentius, haply drest  
In white, called Roman Consul for a jest,  
Taking the people at their word, forth stept  
As upon Brutus' heel, nor ever kept  
Us waiting ; stept he forth and from his brain  
Gave Rome out on its ancient place again,  
Ay, bade proceed with Brutus' Rome kings styled  
Themselves the citizens of, and, beguiled  
Thereby, were fain select the lustrous gem  
Out of a lapfull, spoil their diadem  
—The Senate's cypher was so hard to scratch !  
He flashes like a phanal, men too catch  
The flame, and Rome's accomplished ; when returned  
Otho and John the Consul's step had spurned,  
With Hugo Lord of Este, to redress  
The wrongs of each. Crescentius in the stress  
Of adverse fortune bent. They crucified  
Their Consul in the Forum and abide  
Such slaves at Rome e'er since, that I—(for I  
Was once a brown-sleeve brother, merrily



Appointed)—I had option to keep wife  
Or keep brown sleeves, and managed in the strife  
Lose both. A song of Rome!

And Rome, indeed,  
Robed at Goito in fantastic weed,  
The Mother-City of those Mantuan days,  
Looked an established point of light whence rays  
Traversed the world; and all the clustered homes  
Beside of men were bent on being Romes  
In their degree; the question was how each  
Should most resemble Rome, clean out of reach  
Herself; nor struggled either principle  
To change what it aspired possess—Rome, still  
For Friedrich or Honorius.

Rome's the Cause!

The Rome of the old Pandects, our new laws—  
The Capitol turned Castle Angelo  
And structures that inordinately glow  
Corrected by the Theatre forlorn  
As a black mundane shell, its world late born  
—Verona, that's beside it. These combined,  
We typify the scheme to put mankind  
Once more in full possession of their rights  
By his sole agency. On me it lights

To build up Rome again—me, first and last :  
For such a Future was endured the Past !  
And thus in the grey twilight forth he sprung  
To give his thought consistency among  
The People's self, and let their truth avail  
Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale.

## BOOK THE FIFTH.



Is it the same Sordello in the dusk  
As at the dawn? merely a perished husk  
Now, that arose a power like to build  
Up Rome again? The proud conception chilled  
So soon? Ay, watch that latest dream of thine  
—A Rome indebted to no Palatine,  
Drop arch by arch, Sordello! Art possess  
Of thy wish now—rewarded for thy quest  
To-day among Ferrara's squalid sons—  
Are this and this and this the shining ones  
Meet for the Shining City? Sooth to say  
Our favoured tenantry pursue their way  
After a fashion! This companion slips  
On the smooth causey, t'other blinkard trips  
At his mooned sandal. Leave to lead the brawls  
Here i' the atria? No, friend. He that sprawls

On aught but a stibadium suffers . . . goose,  
Puttest our lustral vase to such an use?  
Oh, huddle up the day's disasters—march  
Ye runagates, and drop thou, arch by arch,  
Rome!

Yet before they quite disband—a whim—  
Study a shelter, now, for him, and him,  
Nay, even him, to house them! any cave  
Suffices—throw out earth. A loophole? Brave!  
They ask to feel the sun shine, see the grass  
Grow, hear the larks sing? Dead art thou, alas,  
And I am dead! But here's our son excels  
At hurdle-weaving any Scythian, fells  
Oak and devises rafters, dreams and shapes  
That dream into a door-post, just escapes  
The mystery of hinges. Lie we both  
Perdue another age. The goodly growth  
Of brick and stone! Our building-pelt was rough,  
But that descendant's garb suits well enough  
A portico-contriver. Speed the years—  
What's time to us? and lo, a city rears  
Itself! nay, enter—what's the grave to us?  
So our forlorn acquaintance carry thus  
A head! successively sewer, forum, cirque—  
Last age that aqueduct was counted work,

And now they tire the artificer upon  
Blank alabaster, black obsidion,  
—Careful Jove's face be duly fulgorant,  
And mother Venus' kiss-creased nipples pant  
Back into pristine pulpiness, ere fixed  
Above the baths. What difference betwixt  
This Rome and ours? Resemblance what between  
The scurvy dumb-show and the pageant sheen—  
These Romans and our rabble? Rest thy wit  
And listen : step by step,—a workman fit  
With each, nor too fit,—to one's task, one's time,—  
No leaping o'er the petty to the prime,  
When just the substituting osier lithe  
For bulrushes, and after, wood for withe  
To further loam and roughcast work a stage,  
Exacts an architect, exacts an age,—  
Nor tables of the Mauritanian tree  
For men whose maple-log 's their luxury,—  
And Rome's accomplished ! Better (say you) merge  
At once all workmen in the demiurge,  
All epochs in a life-time, and all tasks  
In one : undoubtedly the city basks  
I' the day—while those you'd feast there want the knack  
Of keeping fresh-chalked gowns from speck and brack,

Distinguish not your peacock from your swan,  
Or Mareotic juice from Cœcuban,  
Nay sneer . . . enough ! 'twas happy to conceive  
Rome on a sudden, nor shall fate bereave  
Us of that credit : for the rest, her spite  
Is an old story—serves us very right  
For adding yet another to the dull  
List of devices—things proved beautiful  
Could they be done, Sordello cannot do.

He sate upon the terrace, plucked and threw  
The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift  
Rome's walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift  
Mist-like afar those pillars of all stripe,  
Mounds of all majesty. Thou archetype,  
Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart !

And then a low voice wound into his heart :  
Sordello (lower than a Pythoness  
Conceding to a Lydian King's distress  
The cause of his long error—one mistake  
Of her past oracle) Sordello, wake !  
Where is the vanity ? Why count you, one  
The first step with the last step ? What is gone  
Except that æry magnificence—  
That last step you took first ? an evidence

You were . . . no matter. Let those glances fall !  
This basis, this beginning step of all,  
Which proves you one of us, is this gone too ?  
Pity to disconcert one versed as you  
In fate's ill-nature, but its full extent  
Eludes Sordello, even : the veil 's rent,  
Read the black writing—that collective man  
Outstrips the individual ! Who began  
The greatnesses you know ?—ay, your own art  
Shall serve us : put the poet's mimes apart—  
Close with the poet—closer—what ? a dim  
Too plain form separates itself from him ?  
Alcama's song enmeshes the lulled Isle,  
Woven into the echoes left erewhile  
Of Nina's, one soft web of song : no more  
Turning his name, now, flower-like o'er and o'er !  
An elder poet 's in the younger's place—  
Take Nina's strength—but lose Alcama's grace ?  
Each neutralizes each then ! gaze your fill ;  
Search further and the past presents you still  
New Ninas, new Alcamas, time's mid-night  
Concluding,—better say its evenlight  
Of yesterday. You, now, in this respect  
Of benefitting people (to reject



The favour of your fearful ignorance  
A thousand phantasms eager to advance,  
Refer you but to those within your reach)  
Were you the first who got, to use plain speech,  
The Multitude to be materialized ?  
That loose eternal unrest—who devised  
An apparition i' the midst ? the rout  
Who checked, the breathless ring who formed about  
That sudden flower ? Get round at any risk  
The gold-rough pointel, silver-blazing disk  
O' the lily ! Swords across it ! Reign thy reign  
And serve thy frolic service, Charlemagne !  
—The very child of over-joyousness,  
Unfeeling thence, strong therefore : Strength by stress  
Of Strength comes of a forehead confident,  
Two widened eyes expecting heart's content,  
A calm as out of just-quelled noise, nor swerves  
The ample cheek for doubt, in gracious curves  
Abutting on the upthrust nether lip—  
He wills, how should he doubt then ? Ages slip—  
Was it Sordello pried into the work  
So far accomplished, and discovering lurk  
A company amid the other clans,  
Only distinct in priests for castellans

And popes for suzerains (their rule confessed  
Its rule, their interest its interest,  
Living for sake of living—there an end,  
Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend  
In making adversaries or allies) ;  
Dived he into its capabilities  
And dared create out of that sect a soul  
Should turn the multitude, already whole,  
To some account? Speak plainer! Is't so sure  
God's church lives by a King's investiture?  
Look to last step : a staggering—a shock—  
What 's sand shall be demolished, but the rock  
Endures—a column of black fiery dust  
Blots heaven—woe, woe, 'tis prematurely thrust  
Aside, that step!—the air clears—nought's erased  
Of the true outline? Thus much is firm based—  
The other was a scaffold : see you stand  
Buttressed upon his mattock Hildebrand  
Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o'er ply  
As in a forge ; it buries either eye  
White and extinct, that stupid brow ; teeth clenched,  
The neck 's tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,  
As if a cloud enveloped him while fought  
Under it all, grim prizers, thought with thought

At dead-lock, agonizing he, until  
The victor thought leap radiant up, and Will,  
The slave with folded arms and drooping lids  
They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.  
—A root, the crippled mandrake of the earth,  
Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,  
Be certain ; fruit of suffering's excess,  
Whence feeling, therefore stronger : still by stress  
Of Strength, work Knowledge ! Full three hundred years  
For men to wear away in smiles and tears  
Between the two that nearly seem to touch,  
Observe you : quit one workman and we clutch  
Another, letting both their trains go by—  
The actors-out of either's policy,  
Heinrich, on this hand, Otho, Barbaross,  
May carry the Imperial crowns across,  
Aix' Iron, Milan's Silver, and Rome's Gold—  
As Alexander, Innocent uphold  
On that the Papal keys—but, link on link,  
Why is it neither chain betrays a chink ?  
How coalesce the small and great ? Alack,  
For one thrust forward, fifty such fall back !  
The couple there alone help Gregory ?  
Hark—from the hermit Peter's thin sad cry

At Claremont, yonder to the serf that says  
Friedrich 's no liege of his while he delays  
Getting the Pope's curse off him ! The Crusade—  
Or trick of breeding strength by other aid  
Than strength, is safe : hark—from the wild harangue  
Of Vimmercato, to the carroch's clang.  
Yonder ! The League—or trick of turning strength  
Against pernicious strength, is safe at length :  
Yet hark—from Mantuan Albert's making cease  
The fierce ones, to Saint Francis preaching peace  
Yonder ! God's Truce—or trick to supersede  
The use of strength at all, is safe. Indeed  
We trench upon the future ! Who shall found  
Next step, next age—trail plenteous o'er the ground  
Vine-like, produced by joy and sorrow, whence  
Unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence :  
Knowledge by stress of Knowledge is it ? No—  
E'en were Sordello ready to forego  
His work for this, 'twere overleaping work  
Some one must do before, howe'er it irk :  
No end 's in sight yet of that second road :  
Who means to help must still support the load  
Hildebrand lifted—why hast Thou, he groaned,  
Imposed, my God, a thing thy Paul had moaned,

Thy Moses failed beneath, on me? and yet  
That grandest of the tasks God ever set  
On man left much to do : a mighty wrench—  
The scaffold falls—but half the pillars blench  
Merely, start back again—perchance have been  
Taken for buttresses : crash every screen,  
Hammer the tenons better, and engage  
A gang about your work, for the next age  
Or two, of Knowledge, part by Strength and part  
By Knowledge ! then—Ay, then perchance may start  
Sordello on his race—but who'll divulge  
Time's secrets? lo, a step's awry, a bulge  
To be corrected by a step we thought  
Got over long ago—till that is wrought,  
No progress ! and that scaffold in its turn  
Becomes, its service o'er, a thing to spurn.  
Meanwhile, your some half-dozen years of life  
Longer, dispose you to forego the strife—  
Who takes exception? 'Tis Ferrara, mind,  
Before us, and Goito's left behind :  
As you then were, as half yourself, desist !  
—The warrior-part of you may, an it list,  
Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,  
Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys

By wielding one in fancy,—what is bard  
Of you, may spurn the vehicle that marred  
Elys so much, and in mere fancy glut  
His sense on her free beauties—we have but  
To please ourselves for law, and you could please  
What then appeared yourself by dreaming these  
Rather than doing these: now—fancy's trade  
Is ended, mind, nor one half may evade  
The other half: our friends are half of you:  
Out of a thousand helps, just one or two  
Can be accomplished presently—but flinch  
From these (as from the faulchion raised an inch,  
Elys described a couplet) and make proof  
Of fancy,—and, while one half lolls aloof  
O' the grass completing Rome to the tip-top—  
See if, for that, the other half will stop  
A tear, begin a smile: that rabble's woes,  
Ludicrous in their patience as they chose  
To sit about their town and quietly  
Be slaughtered,—the poor reckless soldiery,  
With their ignoble rhymes on Richard, how  
Polt-foot, sang they, was in a pitfall now,  
Cheering each other from the engine-mounts,—  
That crippled spawling idiot who recounts

How, lopt of limbs, he lay, stupid as stone,  
Till the pains crept from out him one by one,  
And wriggles round the archers on his head  
To earn a morsel of their chesnut bread,—  
And Cino, always in the self-same place  
Weeping ; beside that other wretches' case  
Eyepits to ear one gangrene since he plied  
The engine in his coat of raw sheep's hide  
A double watch in the noon sun ; and see  
Lucchino, beauty, with the favors free,  
Trim hacqueton and sprucely scented hair,  
Campaigning it for the first time—cut there  
In two already, boy enough to crawl  
For latter orpine round the Southern wall,  
Tomà, where Richard 's kept, because that whore  
Marfisa the fool never saw before  
Sickened for flowers this wearisomest siege :  
Then Tiso's wife—men liked their pretty liege,  
Cared for her least of whims once, Berta, wed  
A twelvemonth gone, and, now poor Tiso 's dead,  
Delivering herself of his first child  
On that chance heap of wet filth, reconciled  
To fifty gazers. (Here a wind below  
Made moody music augural of woe



From the pine barrier)—What if, now the scene  
Draws to a shutting, if yourself have been  
—You, plucking purples in Goito's moss  
Like edges of a trabea (not to cross  
Your consul-feeling) or dry aloe-shafts  
Here at Ferrara—He whom fortune wafts  
This very age her best inheritance  
Of opportunities? Yet we advance,  
Upon the last! Since talking is your trade,  
There's Salinguerra left you to persuade,  
And then—

No—no—which latest chance secure!

Leapt up and cried Sordello : this made sure,  
The Past is yet redeemable whose work  
Was—help the Guelfs, and I, howe'er it irk,  
Thus help! He shook the foolish aloe-haulm  
Out of his doublet, paused, proceeded calm  
To the appointed presence. The large head  
Turned on its socket; And your spokesman, said  
The large voice, is Elcorte's happy sprout?  
Few such (so finishing a speech no doubt  
Addressed to Palma, silent at his side)  
Our sober councils have diversified:  
Elcorte's son!—but forward as you may,  
Our lady's minstrel with so much to say!

The hesitating sunset floated back,  
Rosily traversed in a single track  
The chamber, from the lattice o'er the girth  
Of pines to the huge eagle blacked in earth  
Opposite, outlined sudden, spur to crest,  
That solid Salinguerra, and caressed  
Palma's contour ; 'twas Day looped back Night's pall ;  
Sordello had a chance left spite of all.

And much he made of the convincing speech  
He meant should compensate the Past and reach  
Through his youth's daybreak of unprofit, quite  
To his noon's labour, so proceed till night  
At leisure ! The contrivances to bind  
Taurello body with the Cause and mind,  
—Was the consummate rhetoric just that ?  
Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat  
Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,  
Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke :  
Was't not a touching incident—so prompt  
A rendering the world its just accout  
Once proved its debtor ? Who'd suppose before  
This proof that he, Goito's God of yore,  
At duty's instance could demean himself  
So memorably, dwindle to a Guelf ?

Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped,  
His inmost self at the out-portion peeped  
Thus occupied ; then stole a glance at those  
Appealed to, curious if her colour rose  
Or his lip moved, while he discreetly urged  
The need of Lombardy's becoming purged  
At soonest of her barons ; the poor part  
Abandoned thus missing the blood at heart,  
Spirit in brain, unseasonably off  
Elsewhere ! But, though his speech was worthy scoff,  
Good-humoured Salinguerra, famed for tact  
That way, who, careless of his phrase, ne'er lacked  
The right phrase, and harangued Honorius dumb  
At his accession, looked as all fell plumb  
To purpose and himself took interest  
In every point his new instructor pressed  
—Left playing with the rescript's white wax seal  
To scrutinize Sordello head to heel :  
Then means he . . . yes, assent sure ? Well ? Alas,  
He said no more than, So it comes to pass  
That poesy, sooner than politics,  
Makes fade young hair : to think his speech could fix  
Taurello !

Then a flash ; he knew the truth :  
So fantasies shall break and fritter youth

That he has long ago lost earnestness,  
Lost will to work, lost power to express  
Even the need of working! Ere the grave  
No more occasions now, though he should crave  
One such in right of superhuman toil  
To do what was undone, repair his spoil,  
Alter the Past—nought brings again the chance!  
Not that he was to die: he saw askance  
Protract the ignominious years beyond  
To dream in—time to hope and time despond,  
Remember and forget, be sad, rejoice  
As saved a trouble, suited to his choice,  
—One way or other idle life out, drop  
No few smooth verses by the way—for prop  
A thyrsus these sad people should, the same,  
Pick up, set store by, and, so far from blame,  
Plant o'er his hearse convinced his better part  
Survived him. Rather tear men out the heart  
Of the truth! Sordello muttered, and renewed  
His propositions for the Multitude.

But Salinguerra who, the last attack,  
Threw himself in his ruffling corslet back  
To hear the better, smilingly resumed  
Some task; beneath the carroch's warning boomed;

He must decide with Tito ; courteously  
He turned then, even seeming to agree  
With his admonisher—" Assist the Pope, .  
Extend his domination, fill the scope  
Of the Church based on All, by All, for All—  
Change Secular to Evangelical"—  
Echoing his very sentence : all seemed lost,  
When sudden he looked, laughingly almost,  
To Palma : This opinion of your friend's  
For instance, would it answer Palma's ends ?  
Best, were it not, turn Guelf, submit our Strength  
(Here he drew out his baldric to its length)  
To the Pope's Knowledge—letting Richard slip,  
Wide to the walls throw ope your gates, equip  
Azzo with . . . but no matter ! Who 'll subscribe  
To a trite censure of the minstrel tribe  
Henceforward ? or pronounce, as Heinrich used,  
" Spear-heads for battle, burr-heads for the joust "  
—When Constance, for his couplets, would promote  
Alcama from a parti-coloured coat  
To holding her lord's stirrup in the wars.  
Not that I see where couplet-making jars  
With common sense : at Mantua we had borne  
This chanted, easier than their most forlorn

Of bull-fights, that's indisputable !

Brave !

Whom vanity nigh slew, contempt shall save !  
All's at an end : a Troubadour suppose  
Mankind 's to class him with their friends or foes ?  
A puny uncouth ailing vassal think  
The world and him in some especial link ?  
Abrupt the visionary tether 's burst—  
What's to reward or what to be amerced  
If a poor drudge, solicitous to dream  
Deservingly, gets tangled by his theme  
So far as to conceit his knack or gift  
Or whatsoe'er it be of verse might lift  
The globe, a lever like the hand and head  
Of—Men of Action, as the Jongleurs said,  
—The Great Men, in the people's dialect ?

And not a moment did this scorn affect  
Sordello : scorn the poet ? They, for once,  
Asking "what was," obtained a full response.  
Bid Naddo think at Mantua, he had but  
To look into his promptuary, put  
His hand on a set thought in a set speech :  
And was Sordello fitted thus for each  
Conjuncture ? No wise ; since within his soul  
Perception brooded unexpressed and whole :

A healthy spirit like a healthy frame  
Craves aliment in plenty and, the same,  
Changes, assimilates its aliment :  
Perceived Sordello, on a truth intent ?  
Next day no formularies more you saw  
Than figs or olives in a sated maw  
—'Tis Knowledge whither such perceptions tend,  
They lose themselves in that, means to an end,  
The Many Old producing some One New,  
A Last unlike the First. If lies are true,  
The Caliph Haroun's man of brass receives  
A meal, ay, millet grains and lettuce leaves  
Together in his stomach rattle loose—  
You find them perfect next day to produce  
But ne'er expect the man, on strength of that,  
Can roll an iron camel-collar flat  
Like Haroun's self! I tell you, what was stored  
Parcel by parcel through his life, outpoured  
That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing :  
And round those three the People formed a ring,  
Suspended their own vengeance, chose await  
The issue of this strife to reinstate  
Them in the right of taking it—in fact  
He must be proved their lord ere they exact



Amends for that lord's defalcation. Last,  
A reason why the phrases flowed so fast  
Was in his quite forgetting for the time  
Himself in his amazement that his rhyme  
Disguised the royalty so much : he there—  
They full face to him—and yet unaware  
Who was the King and who . . . But if I lay  
On thine my spirit and compel obey  
His lord—Taurello ? Impotent to build  
Another Rome, but hardly so unskilled  
In what such builder should have been as brook  
One shame beyond the charge that he forsook  
His function ! Set me free that shame I bend  
A brow before, suppose new years to spend,  
Allow each chance, nor fruitlessly, recur—  
Measure thee with the Minstrel, then, demur  
At any crown he claims ! That I must cede  
As 'tis, my right to my especial meed—  
Confess you fitter help the world than I  
Ordained its champion from eternity,  
Is much : but to behold you scorn the post  
I quit in your behalf—as aught 's to boast  
Unless you help the world ! And while he rung  
The changes on this theme, the roof up-sprung,

The sad walls of the presence-chamber died  
Into the distance, or, embowering vied  
With far-away Goito's vine-frontier ;  
And crowds of faces (only keeping clear  
The rose-light in the midst, his vantage-ground  
To fight their battle from) deep clustered round  
Sordello, with good wishes no mere breath,  
Kind prayers for him no vapour, since, come death,  
Come life, he was fresh-sinewed every joint,  
Each bone new-marrowed as whom Gods anoint  
Though mortal to their rescue : now let sprawl  
The snaky volumes hither, Typhon's all  
For Hercules to trample—good report  
From Salinguerra 's only to extort ?

So was I (closed he his inculcating  
A poet must be earth's essential king)  
So was I, royal so, and if I fail  
'Tis not the royalty ye witness quail  
But one deposed who, caring not exert  
Its proper essence, trifled malapert  
With accidents instead—good things assigned  
The herald of a better thing behind—  
And, worthy through display of these, put forth  
Never the inmost all-surpassing worth

That constitutes him King precisely since  
As yet no other creature may evince  
Its like : the power he took most pride to test,  
Whereby all forms of life had been professed  
At pleasure, forms already on the earth,  
Was but a means to power whose novel birth  
Should, in its novelty, be kingship's proof—  
Now, whether he came near or kept aloof,  
Those forms unalterable first to last  
Proved him her copy, not the protoplast  
Of Nature : what could come of being free  
By action to exhibit tree for tree,  
Bird, beast for beast and bird, or prove earth bore  
A veritable man or woman more ?  
Means to an end, such proofs ; and what the end ?  
Your essence, whatsoe'er it be, extend—  
Never contract ! Already you include  
The multitude ; now let the multitude  
Include yourself, and the result is new ;  
Themselves before, the multitude turn you ;  
This were to live and move and have (in them)  
Your being, and secure a diadem  
That's to transmit (because no cycle yearns  
Beyond itself, but on itself returns)

When the full sphere in wane, the world o'erlaid  
Long since with you, shall have in turn obeyed  
Some orb still prouder, some displayer, still  
More potent than the last, of human Will,  
And some new King depose the old. Of such  
Am I—whom pride of this elates too much ?  
Safe, rather say, mid troops of peers again ;  
I, with my words, hailed brother of the train  
Once deeds sufficed : for, let the world roll back,  
Who fails, through deeds diverse so e'er, re-track  
My purpose still, my task ? A teeming crust—  
Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict—see ! Needs must  
Emerge some Calm embodied these refer  
(Saturn—no yellow-bearded Jupiter !)  
The brawl to ; some existence like a pact  
And protest against Chaos, some first fact  
I' the faint of Time . . . my deep of life, I know,  
Is unavailing e'en to poorly show  
(For here the Chief immeasurably yawned)  
Deeds in their due gradation till Song dawned—  
The fullest effluence of the finest mind  
All in degree, no way diverse in kind  
From those about us, minds which, more or less,  
Lofty or low, in moving seek impress

Themselves on somewhat ; but one mind has climbed  
Step after step, by just ascent sublimed :  
Thought is the soul of act, and stage by stage,  
Is soul from body still to disengage  
As tending to a freedom which rejects  
Such help and incorporeally affects  
The world, producing deeds but not by deeds,  
Swaying, in others, frames itself exceeds,  
Assigning them the simpler tasks it used  
As patiently perform till Song produced  
Acts, by thoughts only, for the mind : divest  
Mind of e'en Thought, and, lo, God's unexpressed  
Will dawns above us. But so much to win  
Ere that ! A lesser round of steps within  
The last. About me, faces ! and they flock,  
The earnest faces ! What shall I unlock  
By song ? behold me prompt, whate'er it be,  
To minister : how much can mortals see  
Of Life ? No more ? I covet the first task  
And marshal yon Life's elemental Masque  
Of Men, on evil or on good lay stress,  
This light, this shade make prominent, suppress  
All ordinary hues that softening blend  
Such natures with the level : apprehend

Which evil is, which good, if I allot  
Your Hell, the Purgatory, Heaven ye wot,  
To those you doubt concerning : I enwomb  
Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb,  
Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph  
With the black chastening river I engulph ;  
Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine  
With languors of the planet of decline—  
These fail to recognise, to arbitrate  
Between henceforth, to rightly estimate  
Thus marshalled in the Masque ! Myself, the while,  
As one of you, am witness, shrink or smile  
At my own showing ! Next age—what's to do ?  
The men and women stationed hitherto  
Will I unstation, good and bad, conduct  
Each nature to its farthest or obstruct  
At soonest in the world : Light, thwarted, breaks  
A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,  
Or Shadow, helped, freezes to gloom : behold  
How such, with fit assistance to unfold,  
Or obstacles to crush them, disengage  
Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war  
In presence of you all ! Myself implied [wage,  
Superior now, as, by the platform's side,



Bidding them do and suffer to content  
The world . . . no—that I wait not—circumvent  
A few it has contented, and to these  
Offer unveil the last of mysteries  
I boast ! Man's life shall have yet freer play :  
Once more I cast external things away  
And Natures, varied now, so decompose  
That . . . but enough ! Why fancy how I rose,  
Or rather you advanced since evermore  
Yourselves effect what I was fain before  
Effect, what I supplied yourselves suggest,  
What I leave bare yourselves can now invest ?  
How we attained to talk as brothers talk,  
In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk  
From discontinuing old aids—To-day  
Takes in account the work of Yesterday—  
Has not the world a Past now, its adept  
Consults ere he dispense with or accept  
New aids ? a single touch more may enhance,  
A touch less turn to insignificance  
Those structures' symmetry the Past has strewed  
Your world with, once so bare : leave the mere rude  
Explicit details, 'tis but brother's speech  
We need, speech where an accent's change gives each



The other's soul—no speech to understand  
By former audience—need was then expand,  
Expatiate—hardly were they brothers ! true—  
Nor I lament my less remove from you,  
Nor reconstruct what stands already : ends  
Accomplished turn to means : my art intends  
New structure from the ancient : as they changed  
The spoils of every clime at Venice, ranged  
The horned and snouted Lybian God, upright  
As in his desert, by some simple bright  
Clay cinerary pitcher—Thebes as Rome,  
Athens as Byzant rifled, till their Dome  
From Earth's reputed consummations razed  
A seal the all-transmuting Triad blazed  
Above. Ah, whose that fortune ? ne'ertheless  
E'en he must stoop contented to express  
No tithe of what's to say—the vehicle  
Never sufficient—but his work is still  
For faces like the faces that select  
A single service I am bound effect  
Nor murmur, bid me, still as poet, bow  
Taurello to the Guelf cause, disallow  
The Kaiser's coming—which with heart, soul, strength,  
I labour for, this eve, who feel at length

My past career's outrageous vanity  
And would (as vain amends) die, even die  
Now I first estimate the boon of life,  
So death might bow Taurello—sure this strife  
Is the last strife—the People my support.

My poor Sordello ! what may we extort  
By this, I wonder ? Palma's lighted eyes  
Turned to Taurello who, as past surprise,  
Began, You love him—what you'd say at large  
If I say briefly ? First your father's charge  
To me, his friend, peruse : I guessed indeed  
You were no stranger to the course decreed  
Us both : I leave his children to the saints :  
As for a certain project, he acquaints  
The Pope with that, and offers him the best  
Of your possessions to permit the rest  
Go peaceably—to Ecelin, a stripe  
Of soil the cursed Vicentines will gripe,  
—To Alberic, a patch the Trevisan  
Clutches already ; extricate who can  
Treville, Villarazzi, Puissolo,  
Cartiglione, Loria—all go,  
And with them go my hopes ! 'Tis lost, then ! Lost  
This eve, our crisis, and some pains it cost

Procuring ; thirty years—as good I'd spent  
Like our admonisher ! But each his bent  
Pursues—no question, one might live absurd  
Oneself this while, by deed as he by word,  
Persisting to obtrude an influence where  
'Tis made account of much as . . . nay, you fare  
With twice the fortune, youngster—I submit,  
Happy to parallel my waste of wit  
With the renowned Sordello's—you decide  
A course for me—Romano may abide  
Romano,—Bacchus ! Who'd suppose the dearth  
Of Ecelins and Alberics on earth ?  
Say there's a thing in prospect, must disgrace  
Betide competitors ? An obscure place  
Suits me—there wants youth, bustle, one to stalk  
And attitudinize—some fight, more talk,  
Most flaunting badges—'twere not hard make clear  
Since Friedrich's very purposes lie here  
—Here—pity they are like to lie ! For me,  
Whose station's fixed unceremoniously  
Long since, small use contesting ; I am but  
The liegeman, you are born the lieges—shut  
That gentle mouth now !—or resume your kin  
In your sweet self ; Palma were Ecelin

For me and welcome ! Could that neck endure  
This bauble for a cumbrous garniture  
You should . . . or might one bear it for you ? Stay—  
I have not been so flattered many a day  
As by your pale friend—Bacchus ! The least help  
Would lick the hind's fawn to a lion's whelp—  
His neck is broad enough—a ready tongue  
Beside—too writhled—but, the main thing, young—  
I could . . . why look ye !

And the badge was thrown  
Across Sordello's neck : this badge alone  
Makes you Romano's Head—the Lombard's Curb  
Turns on your neck which would, on mine, disturb  
My pauldron, said Taurello. A mad act,  
Nor dreamed about a moment since—in fact  
Not when his sportive arm rose for the nonce—  
But he had dallied overmuch, this once,  
With power : the thing was done, and he, aware  
The thing was done, proceeded to declare  
(So like a nature made to serve, excel  
In serving, only feel by service well)  
That he should make him all he said and more :  
As good a scheme as any : what's to pore  
At in my face ? he asked—ponder instead  
This piece of news ; you are Romano's Head—

One cannot slacken pace so near the goal,  
Suffer my Azzo to escape heart-whole  
This time ! For you there's Palma to espouse—  
For me, one crowning trouble ere I house  
Like my compeer.

On which ensued a strange  
And solemn visitation—mighty change  
O'er every one of them—each looked on each—  
Up in the midst a truth grew, without speech,  
And when the giddiness sank and the haze  
Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,  
Sordello with the baldric on, his sire  
Silent though his proportions seemed aspire  
Momently ; and, interpreting the thrill  
Nigh at its ebb, Palma you found was still  
Relating somewhat Adelaide confessed  
'A year ago, while dying on her breast,  
Of a contrivance that Vicenza night,  
Her Ecelin had birth : their convoy's flight  
Cut off a moment, coiled inside the flame  
That wallowed like a dragon at his game  
The toppling city through—San Biagio rocks !  
And wounded lies in her delicious locks  
Retrude, the frail mother, on her face,  
None of her wasted, just in one embrace

Covering her child : when, as they lifted her,  
Cleaving the tumult, mighty, mightier  
And mightiest Taurello's cry outbroke,  
Leapt like a tongue of fire that cleaves the smoke,  
Midmost to cheer his Mantuans onward—drown  
His colleague's clamour, Ecelin's, up, down  
The disarray : failed Adelaide see then  
Who was the natural Chief, the Man of Men ?  
Outstripping time her Ecelin burst swathe,  
Stood up with haggard eyes beyond the scathe  
From wandering after his heritage  
Lost once and lost for aye—what could engage  
That deprecating glance ? A new Shape leant  
On a familiar Shape—gloatingly bent  
O'er his discomfiture ; 'mid wreaths it wore,  
Still one outflamed the rest—her child's before  
'Twas Salinguerra's for his child : scorn, hate  
Rage, startled her from Ecelin—too late !  
A moment's work, and rival's foot had spurned  
Never that brow to earth ! Ere sense returned—  
The act conceived, adventured, and complete,  
They stole away towards an obscure retreat  
Mother and child—Retrude's self not slain  
(Nor even here Taurello moved) though pain



Was fled ; and what assured them most 'twas fled,  
All pain, was, if you raised the pale hushed head  
'Twould turn this way and that, waver awhile,  
And only settle into its old smile  
(Graceful as the disquieted water-flag  
Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag  
On either side their path) when suffered look  
Downward : they marched : no sign of life once shook  
The company's close litter of crossed spears  
Till, as they reached Goito, a few tears  
Slipt in the sunset from her long black lash,  
And she was gone. So far the action rash—  
No crime. They laid Retrude in the font  
Taurello's very gift, her child was wont  
To sit beneath—constant as eve he came  
To sit by its attendant girls the same  
As one of them. For Palma, she would blend  
With this magific spirit to the end  
That ruled her first—but scarcely had she dared  
To disobey the Adelaide who scared  
Her into vowing never to disclose  
A secret to her husband which so froze  
His blood at half recital she contrived  
To hide from him Taurello's infant lived



Lest, by revealing that, himself should mar  
Romano's fortunes : and, a crime so far,  
Palma received that action : she was told  
Of Salinguerra's nature, and his cold  
Calm acquiescence in his lot ! But free  
Impart the secret to Romano, she  
Engaged to repossess Sordello of  
His heritage, and hers, and that way doff  
The mask, but after years, long years !—while now  
Was not Romano's sign-mark on that brow ?

Across Taurello's heart his arms were locked :  
And 'twas, when speak he did, as if he mocked  
The minstrel, who had not to move, he said,  
Not stir—should Fate defraud him of a shred  
Of this son's infancy ? much less of youth  
(Laughingly all this) which to aid, in truth,  
Himself, reserved on purpose, had not grown  
Old, not too old—'twas better keep alone  
Till now, and never idly meet till now :  
—Then, in the same breath, told Sordello how  
The intimations of this eve's event  
Were futile—Friedrich means advance to Trent,  
Thence to Verona, then to Rome—there stop—  
Tumble the Church down, institute a-top

The Alps a Prefecture of Lombardy :

—That's now—no prophesying what may be  
Anon, beneath a monarch of the clime,  
Native of Gesi, passing his youth's prime  
At Naples. Tito bids my choice decide  
On whom . . .

Embrace him, madman ! Palma cried  
Who through the laugh saw sweatdrops burst apace  
And his lips' blanching : he did not embrace  
Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand  
On his own eyes, mouth, forehead.

Understand,

This while Sordello was becoming flushed  
Out of his whiteness ; thoughts rushed, fancies rushed ;  
He pressed his hand upon his head and signed  
Both should forbear him. Nay, the best's behind !  
Taurello laughed—not quite with the same laugh :  
The truth is, thus you scatter, ay, like chaff  
The Guelfs a despicable monk recoils  
From—nor expect a fickle Kaiser spoils  
Our triumph !—Friedrich ? Think you I intend  
Friedrich shall reap the fruits of blood I spend  
And brain I waste ? Think you the people clap  
Their hands at my out-hewing this wild gap

For any Friedrich to fill up ? 'Tis mine—  
That's yours : I tell you towards some such design  
Have I worked blindly, yes, and idly, yes,  
And for another, yes—but worked no less  
With instinct at my heart ; I else had swerved,  
While now—look round ! My cunning has preserved  
Samminiato—that's a central place  
Secures us Florence, boy, in Pisa's case  
By land as she by sea ; with Pisa ours,  
And Florence, and Pistoia, one devours  
The land at leisure ! Gloriously dispersed—  
Brescia, observe, Milan, Piacenza first  
That flanked us (ah, you know not !) in the March ;  
On these we pile, as keystone of our arch,  
Romagna and Bologna, whose first span  
Covered the Trentine and the Valsugan ;  
Sofia's Eгна by Bolgiano's sure . . .  
So he proceeded. Half of all this pure  
Delusion, doubtless, nor the rest too true,  
But what was undone he felt sure to do  
As ring by ring he wrung off, flung away  
The pauldron-rings to give his sword-arm play—  
Need of the sword now ! That would soon adjust  
Aught wrong at present ; to the sword intrust

Sordello's whiteness, undersize ; 'twas plain  
He hardly rendered right to his own brain—  
Like a brave hound men educate to pride  
Himself on speed or scent nor aught beside,  
As though he could not, gift by gift, match men !  
Palma had listened patiently : but when  
'Twas time expostulate, attempt withdraw  
Taurello from his child, she, without awe  
Took off his iron arms from, one by one,  
Sordello's shrinking shoulders, and, that done,  
Made him avert his visage and relieve  
Sordello (you might see his corslet heave [sank :  
The while) who, loose, rose—tried to speak—then  
They left him in the chamber—all was blank.

And even reeling down the castle-stair  
Taurello kept up, as though unaware  
Palma was guide to him, the old device  
—Something of Milan—how we muster thrice  
The Torriani's strength there—all along  
Our own Visconti cowed them—thus the song  
Continued even while she bade him stoop,  
Thrid somehow, by some glimpse of arrow-loop,  
The turnings to the gallery below,  
Where he stopped short as Palma let him go.

When he had sate in silence long enough  
Splintering the stone bench, braving a rebuff  
She stopt the truncheon ; only to commence  
One of Sordello's poems, a pretence  
For speaking, some poor rhyme of Elys' hair  
And head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,  
So smooth and close are laid the few fine locks  
Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks  
Sun-blanced the livelong Summer—from his worst  
Performance, the Goito, as his first :  
And that at end, conceiving from the brow  
And open mouth no silence would serve now,  
Went on to say the whole world loved that man  
And, for that matter, thought his face, tho' wan,  
Eclipsed the Count's—he sucking in each phrase  
As if an angel spoke : the foolish praise  
Ended, he drew her on his mailed knees, made  
Her face a frame-work with his hands, a shade,  
A crown, an aureole—there must she remain  
(Her little mouth compressed with smiling pain  
As in his gloves she felt her tresses twitch)  
To get the best look at, in fittest niche  
Dispose his saint ; that done, he kissed her brow—  
Lauded her father for his treason now,

He told her, only how could one suspect  
The wit in him ? whose clansman, recollect,  
Was ever Salinguerra—she, the same,  
Romano and his lady—so might claim  
To know all, as she should—and thus begun  
Schemes with a vengeance, schemes on schemes, not  
one

Fit to be told that foolish boy, he said,  
But only let Sordello Palma wed,  
—Then !

’Twas a dim long narrow place at best :  
Midway a sole grate showed the fiery West  
As shows its corpse the world’s end some split tomb—  
A gloom, a rift of fire, another gloom  
Faced Palma—but at length Taurello set  
Her free ; the grating held one ragged jet  
Of fierce gold fire : he lifted her within  
The hollow underneath—how else begin  
Fate’s second marvellous cycle, else renew  
The ages than with Palma plain in view ?  
Then paced the passage, hands clenched, head erect,  
Pursuing his discourse ; a grand unchecked  
Monotony made out from his quick talk  
And the recurring noises of his walk ;

—Somewhat too much like the o'ercharged assent  
Of two resolved friends in one danger blent,  
Who hearten each the other against heart—  
Boasting there's nought to care for, when, apart  
The boaster, all's to care for: he, beside  
Some shape not visible, in power and pride  
Approached, out of the dark, ginglyly near,  
Nearer, passed close in the broad light, his ear  
Crimson, eyeballs suffused, temples full-fraught,  
Just a snatch of the rapid speech you caught,  
And on he strode into the opposite dark  
Till presently the harsh heel's turn, a spark  
I' the stone, and whirl of some loose embossed thong  
That crashed against the angle aye so long  
After the last, punctual to an amount  
Of mailed great paces you could not but count,  
Prepared you for the pacing back again:  
And by the snatches might you ascertain  
That, Friedrich's Prefecture surmounted, left  
By this alone in Italy, they cleft  
Asunder, crushed together, at command  
Of none, were free to break up Hildebrand,  
Rebuild, he and Sordello, Charlemagne—  
But garnished, Strength with Knowledge, if we deign



Accept that compromise and stoop to give  
Rome law, the Cæsars' Representative.  
—Enough that the illimitable flood  
Of triumphs after triumphs, understood  
In its faint reflux (you shall hear) sufficed  
Young Ecelin for appanage, enticed  
Him till, these long since quiet in their graves,  
He found 'twas looked for that a long life's braves  
Should somehow be made good—so, weak and worn,  
Must stagger up at Milan, one grey morn  
Of the To-Come, to fight his latest fight.  
And Salinguerra's prophecy at height—  
He voluble with a raised arm and stiff,  
A blaring voice, a blazing eye, as if  
He had our very Italy to keep  
Or cast away, or gather in a heap  
To garrison the better—ay, his word  
Was, “run the cucumber into a gourd,  
Drive Trent upon Apulia”—at their pitch  
Who spied the continents and islands which  
Grew sickles, mulberry leaflets in the map—  
(Strange that three such confessions so should hap  
To Palma Dante spoke with in the clear  
Amorous silence of the Swooning-sphere.

Cunizza, as he called her! Never ask  
Of Palma more! She sate, knowing her task  
Was done, the labour of it—for success  
Concerned not Palma, passion's votaress)  
Triumph at height, I say, Sordello crowned—  
Above the passage suddenly a sound  
Stops speech, stops walk: back shrinks Taurello, bids  
With large involuntary asking lids  
Palma interpret. 'Tis his own foot-stamp—  
Your hand! His summons! Nay, this idle damp  
Befits not. Out they two reeled dizzily:  
“Visconti's strong at Milan,” resumed he  
In the old somewhat insignificant way  
(Was Palma wont years afterward to say)  
As though the spirit's flight sustained thus far  
Dropped at that very instant. Gone they are—  
Palma, Taurello; Eglamor anon,  
Ecelin, Alberic . . . ah, Naddo's gone!  
—Labours this moonrise what the Master meant  
“Is Squarcialupo speckled?—purulent  
I'd say, but when was Providence put out?  
He carries somehow handily about  
His spite nor fouls himself!” Goito's vines  
Stand like a cheat detected—stark rough lines

The moon breaks through, a grey mean scale against  
The vault where, this eve's Maiden, thou remain'st  
Like some fresh martyr, eyes fixed—who can tell?  
As Heaven, now all's at end, did not so well  
Spite of the faith and victory, to leave  
Its virgin quite to death in the lone eve:  
While the persisting hermit-bee . . . ha! wait  
No longer—these in compass, forward fate!

## BOOK THE SIXTH.



THE thought of Eglamor's least like a thought,  
And yet a false one, was, Man shrinks to nought  
If matched with symbols of immensity—  
Must quail, forsooth, before a quiet sky  
Or sea, too little for their quietude :  
And, truly, somewhat in Sordello's mood  
Confirmed its speciousness while evening sank  
Down the near terrace to the further bank,  
And only one spot left out of the night  
Glimmered upon the river opposite—  
A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,  
A sky-like space of water, ray for ray  
And star for star, one richness where they mixed  
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,  
Tumultuary splendors folded in  
To' die : nor turned he till Ferrara's din

(Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip  
Who lets some first and eager purpose slip  
In a new fancy's birth ; the speech keeps on  
Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone)  
Aroused him,—surely offered succour ; fate  
Paused with this eve ; ere she precipitate  
Herself . . . put off strange after-thoughts awhile,  
That voice, those large hands, that portentous smile . . .  
What help to pierce the Future as the Past  
Lay in the plaining city ?

And at last

The main discovery and prime concern,  
All that just now imported him to learn,  
His truth, like yonder slow moon to complete  
Heaven, rose again, and naked at his feet  
Lighted his old life's every shift and change,  
Effort with counter-effort ; nor the range  
Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked  
Some other—which of these could he suspect  
Prying into them by the sudden blaze ?  
The real way seemed made up of all the ways—  
Mood after mood of the one mind in him ;  
Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,  
Of a transcendent all-embracing sense  
Demanding only outward influence,

A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,  
Power to uplift his power, this moon's control,  
Over the sea-depths, and their mass had swept  
Onward from the beginning and still kept  
Its course ; but years and years the sky above  
Held none, and so, untasked of any love,  
His sensitiveness idled, now amort,  
Alive now, and to sullenness or sport  
Given wholly up, disposed itself anew  
At every passing instigation, grew  
And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers spilt,  
Wedge-like insisting, quivered now a gilt  
Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race  
Of whitest ripples o'er the reef—found place  
For myriad charms ; not gathered up and, hurled  
Right from its heart, encompassing the world.  
So had Sordello been, by consequence,  
Without a function : others made pretence  
To strengths not half his own, yet had some core  
Within, submitted to some moon, before  
It still, superior still whate'er its force,  
Were able therefore to fulfil a course  
Nor missed Life's crown, authentic attribute—  
To each who lives must be a certain fruit

Of having lived in his degree, a stage  
Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage,  
To stop at ; and to which those spirits tend  
Who, still discovering beauty without end,  
Amass the scintillations for one star  
—Something unlike them, self-sustained, afar,  
And meanwhile nurse the dream of being blest  
By winning it to notice and invest  
Their souls with alien glory some one day  
Whene'er the nucleus, gathering shape alway,  
Round to the perfect circle—soon or late  
According as themselves are formed to wait ;  
Whether 'tis human beauty will suffice  
—The yellow hair and the luxurious eyes,  
Or human intellect seem best, or each  
Combine in some ideal form past reach  
On earth, or else some shade of these, some aim,  
Some love, hate even, take their place the same,  
That may be served—all this they do not lose,  
Waiting for death to live, nor idly choose  
What Hell shall be—a progress thus pursued  
Through all existence, still above the food  
That 's offered them, still towering beyond  
The widened range in virtue of their bond



Of sovereignty : not that a Palma's Love  
A Salinguerra's Hate would equal prove  
To swaying all Sordello : wherefore doubt,  
Love meet for such a Strength, some Moon 's without  
To match his Sea ?—fear, Good so manifest,  
Only the Best breaks faith ?—but that the Best  
Somehow eludes us ever, still might be  
And is not : crave you gems ? where 's penury  
Of their material round us ? pliant earth,  
The plastic flame—what balks the Mage his birth  
—Jacynth in balls, or lodestone by the block ?  
Flinders enrich the strand and veins the rock—  
No more ! Ask creatures ? Life in tempest, Thought  
Clothes the keen hill-top, mid-day woods are fraught  
With fervors . . . ah, these forms are well enough—  
But we had hoped, encouraged by the stuff  
Profuse at Nature's pleasure, Men beyond  
These Men ! and thus, perchance, are over-fond  
In arguing, from Good the Best, from force  
Divided—force combined, an ocean's course  
From this our sea whose mere intestine pants  
Had seemed at times sufficient to our wants.  
—External Power ? If none be adequate  
And he have been ordained (a prouder fate)

A law to his own sphere ? the need remove  
All incompleteness be that law, that love ?  
Nay, really such be other's laws, though veiled  
In mercy to each vision that had failed  
If unassisted by its Want, for lure,  
Embodied ? stronger vision could endure  
The simple want—no bauble for a truth !  
The People were himself ; and by the ruth  
At their condition was he less impelled  
Alter the discrepancy he beheld  
Than if, from the sound Whole, a sickly Part  
Subtracted were transformed, decked out with art,  
Then palmed on him as alien woe—the Guelf  
To succour, proud that he forsook himself ?  
No : All 's himself—all service, therefore, rates  
Alike, nor serving one part, immolates  
The rest : but all in time ! That lance of yours  
Makes havoc soon with Malek and his Moors,  
That buckler 's lined with many a Giant's beard  
Ere long, Porphyrio, be the lance but reared,  
The buckler wielded handsomely as now ;  
But view your escort, bear in mind your vow,  
Count the pale tracts of sand to pass ere that,  
And, if you hope we struggle through this flat,

Put lance and buckler up—next half-month lacks  
 A sturdy exercise of mace or axe  
 To cleave this dismal brake of prickly-pear  
 That bristling holds Cydippe by the hair,  
 Lames barefoot Agathon.

Oh, People, urge

Your claims!—for thus he ventured to the verge  
 Push a vain mummary which perchance distrust  
 Of his fast-slipping resolution thrust  
 No less: accordingly the Crowd—as yet  
 He had unconsciously contrived forget  
 To dwell upon the points . . . one might assuage  
 The signal horrors sooner than engage  
 With a dim vulgar vast unobvious grief  
 Not to be fancied off, obtain relief  
 In brilliant fits, cured by a happy quirk,  
 But by dim vulgar vast unobvious work  
 To correspond—however, forth they stood:  
 And now content thy stronger vision, brood  
 On thy bare want; the grave stript turf by turf,  
 Study the corpse-face thro' the taint-worms' scurf!

Down sank the People's Then; uprose their Now.  
 These sad ones render service to! And how  
 Piteously little must that service prove  
 —Had surely proved in any case! for move

Each other obstacle away, let youth  
Have been aware it had surprised a Truth  
'Twere service to impart—can Truth be seized,  
Settled forthwith, and of the captive eased  
Its captor look around, since this alit  
So happily, no gesture luring it,  
The earnest of a flock to follow? Vain,  
Most vain! a life's to spend ere this he chain,  
To the poor crowd's complacence; ere the crowd  
Pronounce it captured he descries a cloud  
Its kin of twice the plumage—he, in turn,  
If he shall live as many lives, may learn  
Secure—not otherwise. Then Mantua called  
Back to his mind how certain bards were thrall'd  
—Buds blasted, but of breaths more like perfumes  
Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion blooms  
Could boast—some rose that burnt heart out in sweets,  
A spendthrift in the Spring, no Summer greets—  
Some Dularete, drunk with truths and wine,  
Grown bestial dreaming how become divine.  
Yet to surmount this obstacle, commence  
With the commencement, merits crowning! Hence  
Must Truth be casual Truth, elicited  
In sparks so mean, at intervals disspread

So rarely, that 'tis like at no one time  
Of the world's story has not Truth, the prime  
Of Truth, the very Truth which loosed had hurled  
Its course aright, been really in the world  
Content the while with some mean spark by dint  
Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint  
Of buried fire, which, rip its breast, would stream  
Sky-ward !

Sordello's miserable gleam  
Was looked for at the moment : he would dash  
This badge to earth and all it brought, abash  
Taurello thus, perhaps persuade him wrest  
The Kaiser from his purpose ; would attest  
His constancy in any case. Before  
He dashes it, however, think once more !  
For, was that little truly service ? Ay—  
I' the end, no doubt ; but meantime ? Plain you spy  
Its ultimate Effect, but many flaws  
Of vision blur each intervening Cause ;  
Were the day's fraction clear as the life's sum  
Of service, Now as filled as the To-come  
With evidence of good—nor too minute  
A share to vie with evil ! How dispute  
The Guelfs were fitliest maintained in rule ?  
That made the life's work : not so easy school

Your day's work—say, on natures circumstanced  
So variously, which yet, as each advanced  
Or might impede that Guelf rule, it behoved  
You, for the Then's sake, hate what Now you loved,  
Love what you hated ; nor if one man bore  
Brand upon temples while his fellow wore  
The aureole, would it task us to decide—  
But portioned duly out, the Future vied  
Never with the unparcelled Present ! Smite  
Or spare so much on warrant all so slight ?  
The Present's complete sympathies to break,  
Aversions bear with, for a Future's sake  
So feeble ? Tito ruined through one speck,  
The Legate saved by his sole lightish fleck ?  
This were work, true—but work performed at cost  
Of other work—aught gained here, elsewhere lost—  
For a new segment spoil an orb half-done—  
Rise with the People one step, and sink . . . one ?  
Would it were one step—less than the whole face  
Of things our novel duty bids erase !  
Harms are to vanquish ; what ? the Prophet saith,  
The Minstrel singeth vainly then ? Old faith,  
Old courage, born of the surrounding harms,  
Were not, from highest to the lowest, charms ?

Oh, flame persists but is not glare as stanch ?  
Where the salt marshes stagnate, crystals branch—  
Blood dries to crimson—Evil 's beautified  
In every shape ! But Beauty thrust aside  
You banish Evil : wherefore ? After all  
Is Evil our result less natural  
Than Good ? For overlook the Seasons' strife  
With tree and flower—the hideous animal life,  
Of which who seeks shall find a grinning taunt  
For his solution, must endure the vaunt  
Of Nature's angel, as a child that knows  
Himself befooled, unable to propose  
Aught better than the fooling—and but care  
For Men, the varied People then and there,  
Of which 'tis easy saying Good and Ill  
Claim him alike ! Whence rose the claim but still  
From Ill, the fruit of Ill—what else could knit  
Him theirs but Sorrow ? Any free from it  
Were also free from him ! A happiness  
Could be distinguished in this morning's press  
Of miseries—the fool's who passed a gibe  
On one, said he, so wedded to his tribe  
He carries green and yellow tokens in  
His very face that he 's a Ghibellin—



Much hold on him that fool obtained ! Nay mount  
Yet higher ; and upon Men's own account  
Must Evil stay : for what is Joy ? To heave  
Up one obstruction more, and common leave  
What was peculiar—by this act destroy  
Itself ; a partial death is every joy ;  
The sensible escape, enfranchisement  
Of a sphere's essence : once the vexed—content,  
The cramped—at large, the growing circle—round,  
All's to begin again—some novel bound  
To break, some new enlargement's to entreat,  
The sphere though larger is not more complete.  
Now for Mankind's experience : who alone  
Might style the unobstructed world his own ?  
Whom palled Goito with its perfect things ?  
Sordello's self ; whereas for Mankind springs  
Salvation—hindrances are interposed  
For them, not all Life's view at once disclosed  
To creatures sudden on its summit left  
With Heaven above and yet of wings bereft—  
But lower laid, as at the mountain's foot  
Where, range on range, the girdling forests shoot  
Between the prospect and the throngs who scale  
Earnestly ever, piercing veil by veil,

Confirmed with each discovery ; in their soul  
The Whole they seek by Parts—but, found that Whole,  
Could they revert ? Oh, testify ! The space  
Of time we judge so meagre to embrace  
The Parts, were more than plenty, once attained  
The Whole, to quite exhaust it : for nought's gained  
But leave to look—no leave to do : Beneath  
Soon sates the looker—look Above, then ! Death  
Tempt's ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live  
First, and die soon enough, Sordello ! Give  
Body and spirit the bare right they claim  
To pasture thee on a voluptuous shame  
That thou, a pageant-city's denizen,  
Art neither vilely lodged midst Lombard men—  
Canst force joy out of sorrow, seem to truck  
Thine attributes away for sordid muck,  
Yet manage from that very muck educe  
Gold ; then subject, nor scruple, to thy cruce  
The world's discardings ; think, if ingots pay  
Such pains, the clods that yielded them are clay  
To all save thee, and clay remain though quenched  
Thy purging-fire ; who's robbed then ? Would I wrenched  
An ample treasure forth !—As 'tis, why crave  
A share that ruins me and will not save

Yourselves?—imperiously command I quit  
 The course that makes my joy nor will remit  
 Your woe? Would all arrive at joy? Reverse  
 The order (time instructs you) nor coerce  
 Each unit till, some predetermined mode,  
 The total be emancipate; our road  
 Is one, our times of travel many; thwart  
 No enterprising soul's precocious start  
 Before the general march; if slow or fast  
 All straggle up to the same point at last,  
 Why grudge my having gained a month ago  
 The brakes at balm-shed, asphodels in blow,  
 While you werelandlocked? Speed your Then, but how  
 This badge would suffer me improve my Now!

His time of action for, against, or with  
 Our world (I labour to extract the pith  
 Of this and more) grew up, that even-tide,  
 Gigantic with its power of joy beside  
 The world's eternity of impotence  
 To profit though at all his joy's expense.  
 Make nothing of that time because so brief?  
 Rather make more—instead of joy take grief  
 Before its novelty have time subside;  
 No time for the late savour—leave untried

Virtue, the creaming honey wine, quick squeeze  
Vice like a biting spirit from the lees  
Of life—together let wrath, hatred, lust,  
All tyrannies in every shape be thrust  
Upon this Now, which time may reason out  
As mischiefs, far from benefits, no doubt—  
But long ere then Sordello will have slept  
Away—you teach him at Goito's crypt  
There's a blank issue to that fiery thrill !  
Stirring, the Few cope with the Many, still :  
So much of dust as, quiet, makes a mass  
Unable to produce three tufts of grass,  
Shall, troubled by the whirlwind, render void  
The whole calm glebe's endeavour : be employed !  
And e'en though somewhat smarts the Crowd for this,  
Contributes each his pang to make up bliss,  
'Tis but one pang—one blood-drop to the bowl  
Which brimful tempts the sluggish asp uncowl  
So quick, stains ruddily the dull red cape,  
And, kindling orbs dull as the unripe grape  
Before, avails forthwith to disentrance  
The mischief—soon to lead a mystic dance  
Among you ! Nay, who sits alone in Rome ?  
Have those great hands indeed hewn out a home

For me—compelled to live? Oh Life, life-breath,  
Life-blood,—ere sleep be travail, life ere death!  
This life to feed my soul, direct, oblique,  
But alway feeding! Hindrances? They pique—  
Helps? such . . . but wherefore say my soul o’ertops  
All height—than every depth profounder drops?  
Enough that I can live, and would live! Wait  
For some transcendent life reserved by Fate  
To follow this? Oh, never! Fate I trust  
The same my soul to; for, as who flings dust  
Perchance—so facile was the deed, she chequed  
The void with these materials to affect  
That soul diversely—these consigned anew  
To nought by death, why marvel if she threw  
A second and superber spectacle  
Before it? What may serve for sun—what still  
Wander a moon above me—what else wind  
About me like the pleasures left behind?  
And how shall some new flesh that is not flesh  
Cling to me? what’s new laughter—soothes the fresh  
Sleep like sleep? Fate’s exhaustless for my sake  
In brave resource, but whether bids she slake  
My thirst at this first rivulet or count  
No draught worth lip save from the rocky fount

Above i' the clouds, while here she's provident  
Of (taste) loquacious pearl the soft tree-tent  
Guards, with its face of reate and sedge, nor fail  
The silver globules and gold-sparkling grail  
At bottom—Oh, 'twere too absurd to slight  
For the hereafter the to-day's delight !  
Quench thirst at this, then seek next well-spring—wear  
Home-lilies ere strange lotus in my hair !  
Here is the Crowd, whom I with freest heart  
Offer to serve, contented for my part  
To give this life up once for all, but grant  
I really serve ; if otherwise, why want  
Aught further of me ? Life they cannot chuse  
But set aside—wherefore should I refuse  
The gift ? I take it—I, for one, engage  
Never to falter through the pilgrimage—  
Or end it howling that the stock or stone  
Were enviable, truly : I, for one,  
Will praise the world you style mere anteroom  
To the true palace—but shall I assume  
—My foot the courtly gait, my tongue the trope,  
My eye the glance, before the doors fly ope  
One moment ? What—with guarders row on row,  
Gay swarms of varletry that come and go,



Pages to dice with, waiting-girls unlace  
The plackets of, pert claimants help displace,  
Heart-heavy suitors get a rank for ; laugh  
At yon sleek parasite, break his own staff  
'Cross Beetle-brows the Usher's shoulder ; why—  
Admitted to the presence by and bye,  
Should thought of these recurring make me grieve  
Among new sights I reach, old sights I leave ?  
—Cool citrine-crystals, fierce pyropus-stone—  
Bare floor-work too !—But did I let alone  
That black-eyed peasant in the vestibule  
Once and for ever ?—Floor-work ? No such fool !  
Rather, were Heaven to forestal Earth, I'd say  
Must I be blessed or you ? Then my own way  
Bless me—a firmer arm, a fleeter foot,  
I'll thank you, but to no mad wings transmute  
These limbs of mine—our greensward is too soft ;  
Nor camp I on the thunder-cloud aloft—  
We feel the bliss distinctlier having thus  
Engines subservient, not mixed up with us—  
Better move palpably through Heaven—nor, freed  
Of flesh forsooth, from space to space proceed  
'Mid flying synods of worlds—but in Heaven's marge  
Show Titan still, recumbent o'er his targe



Solid with stars—the Centaur at his game  
Made tremulously out in hoary flame !

Life ! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull  
Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at full,  
Aside so oft ; the death I fly, revealed  
So oft a better life this life concealed  
And which sage, champion, martyr, thro' each path  
Have hunted fearlessly—the horrid bath,  
The crippling-irons and the fiery chair :  
—'Twas well for them ; let me become aware  
As they, and I relinquish Life, too ! Let  
Life's secret but disclose itself ! Forget  
Vain ordinances, I have one appeal—  
I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel  
—So much is Truth to me—What Is then ? Since  
One object viewed diversely may evince  
Beauty and ugliness—this way attract,  
That way repel, why gloze upon the fact ?  
Why must a single of the sides be right ?  
Who bids choose this and leave its opposite ?  
No abstract Right for me—in youth endued  
With Right still present, still to be pursued,  
Thro' all the interchange of circles, rife  
Each with its proper law and mode of life,

Each to be dwelt at ease in : thus to sway  
Regally with the Kaiser, or obey  
Implicit with his Serf of fluttering heart,  
Or, like a sudden thought of God's, to start  
Up in the presence, then go forth and shout  
That some should pick the unstrung jewels out—  
Were well !

And, as in moments when the Past  
Gave partially enfranchisement, he cast  
Himself quite thro' mere secondary states  
Of his soul's essence, little loves and hates,  
Into the mid vague yearnings overlaid  
By these ; as who should pierce hill, plain, grove,  
glade,  
And so into the very nucleus probe  
That first determined there exist a Globe :  
And as that 's easiest half the globe dissolved,  
So seemed Sordello's closing-truth evolved  
In his flesh-half's break up—the sudden swell  
Of his expanding soul showed Ill and Well,  
Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness  
Virtue and Vice, the Larger and the Less,  
All qualities, in fine, recorded here,  
Might be but Modes of Time and this one Sphere,

Urgent on these but not of force to bind  
As Time—Eternity, as Matter—Mind,  
If Mind, Eternity shall choose assert  
Their attributes within a Life: thus girt  
With circumstance, next change beholds them cinct  
Quite otherwise—with Good and Ill distinct,  
Joys, sorrows, tending to a like result—  
Contrived to render easy, difficult,  
This or the other course of . . . what new bond  
In place of flesh may stop their flight beyond  
Its new sphere, as that course does harm or good  
To its arrangements. Once this understood,  
As suddenly he felt himself alone,  
Quite out of Time and this World, all was known.  
What made the secret of the past despair?  
(Most imminent when he seemed most aware  
Of greatness in the Past—nought turned him mad  
Like craving to expand the power he had,  
Not a new power to be expanded)—just  
This made it; Soul on Matter being thrust,  
'Tis Joy when so much Soul is wreaked in Time  
On Matter,—let the Soul attempt sublime  
Matter beyond its scheme and so prevent  
Or more or less that deed's accomplishment,

And Sorrow follows : Sorrow to avoid—  
Let the Employer match the thing Employed,  
Fit to the finite his infinity,  
And thus proceed for ever, in degree  
Changed but in kind the same, still limited  
To the appointed circumstance and dead  
To all beyond : a sphere is but a sphere—  
Small, Great, are merely terms we bandy here—  
Since to the spirit's absoluteness all  
Are like : now of the present sphere we call  
Life, are conditions—take but this among  
Many ; the Body was to be so long  
Youthful, no longer—but, since no control  
Tied to that Body's purposes his Soul,  
It chose to understand the Body's trade  
More than the Body's self—had fain conveyed  
Its boundless, to the body's bounded lot—  
So, the soul permanent, the body not,—  
Scarce the one minute for enjoying here,  
The soul must needs instruct its weak compeer,  
Run o'er its capabilities and wring  
A joy thence it holds worth experiencing—  
Which, far from half discovered even,—lo,  
The minute's gone, the body's power's let go

Apportioned to that joy's acquirement ! Broke,  
Say, morning o'er the earth and all it woke—  
From the volcano's vapour-flag to hoist  
Black o'er the spread of sea, to the low moist  
Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,  
Swayed earthwards, heavily to raise again—  
(The Small a sphere as perfect as the Great  
To the soul's absoluteness)—meditate  
On such an Autumn-morning's cluster-chord  
And the whole music it was framed afford,  
And, the chord's might discovered, what should pluck  
One string, the finger, was found palsy-struck.  
And then what marvel if the Spirit, shown  
A saddest sight—the Body lost alone  
Thro' its officious proffered help, deprived  
Of this and that enjoyment Fate contrived,  
Virtue, Good, Beauty, each allowed slip hence,—  
Vain gloriously were fain, for recompense,  
To stem the ruin even yet, protract  
The Body's term, supply the power it lacked  
From its infinity, compel it learn  
These qualities were only Time's concern,  
That Body may, with its assistance, barred—  
Advance the same, vanquished—obtain reward,

Reap joy where sorrow was intended grow,  
Of Wrong make Right and turn Ill Good below—  
And the result is, the poor Body soon  
Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,  
Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.

So much was plain then, proper in the Past ;  
To be complete for, satisfy the whole  
Series of spheres—Eternity, his soul  
Exceeded, so was incomplete for, each  
One sphere—our Time. But does our knowledge reach  
No farther ? Is the cloud of hindrance broke  
But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,  
Its loves and hates, as now when they let soar  
The spirit, self-sufficient as before,  
Tho' but the single space that shall elapse  
'Twixt its enthrallment in new bonds perhaps ?  
Must Life be ever but escaped, which should  
Have been enjoyed ? nay, might have been and would,  
Once ordered rightly, and a Soul's no whit  
More than the Body's purpose under it  
(A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,  
A sky-like space of water, ray for ray  
And star for star, one richness where they mixed  
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,

Tumultuary splendours folded in  
To die) and which thus, far from first begin  
Exciting discontent, had surest quelled  
The Body if aspiring it rebelled.  
But how so order Life? Still brutalize  
The soul, the sad world's method—muffled eyes  
To all that was before, shall after be  
This sphere—and every other quality  
Save some sole and immutable Great and Good  
And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood  
To follow? Never may some soul see All  
—The Great before and after and the Small  
Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,  
And take the single course prescribed before,  
As the king-bird with ages on his plumes  
Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?  
But where descry the Love that shall select  
That course? Here is a Soul whom to affect  
Nature has plied with all her means—from trees  
And flowers—e'en to the Multitude . . . and these  
Decides he save or no? One word to end!

Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend  
And speak for you. A Power above him still  
Which, utterly incomprehensible,



Is out of rivalry, which thus he can  
Love, tho' unloving all conceived by Man—  
What need ! And of—none the minutest duct  
To that out-Nature, nought that would instruct  
And so let rivalry begin to live—  
But of a Power its representative  
Who, being for authority the same,  
Communication different, should claim  
A course the first chose and this last revealed—  
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—  
The utter need !

What has Sordello found ?

Or can his spirit go the mighty round  
At length, end where our souls begun ? as says  
Old fable, the two doves were sent two ways  
About the world—where in the midst they met  
Tho' on a shifting waste of sand, men set  
Jove's temple ? Quick, what has Sordello found ?  
For they approach—approach—that foot's rebound . .  
Palma ? No, Salinguerra tho' in mail ;  
They mount, have reached the threshold, dash the veil  
Aside—and you divine who sat there dead  
Under his foot the badge ; still, Palma said,  
A triumph lingering in the wide eyes  
Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies

Help from above in his extreme despair  
And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there  
With short and passionate cry ; as Palma prest  
In one great kiss her lips upon his breast  
It beat. By this the hermit-bee has stopped  
His day's toil at Goito—the new cropped  
Dead vine-leaf answers, now 'tis eve, he bit,  
Twirled so, and filed all day—the mansion's fit  
God counselled for ; as easy guess the word  
That passed betwixt them and become the third  
To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax  
Him with one fault—so no remembrance racks  
Of the stone maidens and the font of stone  
He, creeping thro' the crevice, leaves alone—  
Alas, my friend—Alas Sordello ! whom  
Anon we laid within that cold font-tomb—  
And yet again alas !

And now is 't worth  
Our while bring back to mind, much less set forth  
How Salinguerra extricates himself  
Without Sordello ? Ghibellin and Guelf  
May fight their fiercest ? If Count Richard sulked  
In durance or the Marquis paid his mulct,  
Who cares, Sordello gone ? The upshot, sure,  
Was peace ; our chief made some frank overture

That prospered ; compliment fell thick and fast  
On its disposer, and Taurello passed  
With foe and friend for an outstripping soul  
Nine days at least : then, fairly reached the goal,  
He, by one effort, blotted the great hope  
Out of his mind, no further tried to cope  
With Este that mad evening's style, but sent  
Away the Legate and the League, content  
No blame at least the brothers had incurred,  
—Despatched a message to the Monk he heard  
Patiently first to last, scarce shivered at,  
Then curled his limbs up on his wolfskin mat  
And ne'er spoke more,—informed the Ferrarese  
He but retained their rule so long as these  
Lingered in pupilage—and last, no mode  
Apparent else of keeping safe the road  
From Germany direct to Lombardy  
For Friedrich, none, that is, to guarantee  
The faith and promptitude of who should next  
Obtain Sofia's dowry, sore perplexed—  
(Sofia being youngest of the tribe  
Of daughters Ecelin was wont to bribe  
The envious magnates with—nor since he sent  
Enrico Egna this fair child had Trent

Once failed the Kaiser's purposes—we lost  
Egna last year, and who takes Egna's post—  
Opens the Lombard gate if Friedrich knock ?)  
Himself espoused the Lady of the Rock  
In pure necessity, and so destroyed  
His slender last of chances, quite made void  
Old prophecy, and spite of all the schemes  
Overt and covert, youth's deeds, age's dreams,  
Was sucked into Romano : and so hushed  
He up this evening's work, that when, 'twas brushed  
Somehow against by a blind chronicle  
Which, chronicling whatever woe befell  
Ferrara, scented this the obscure woe  
And "Salinguerra's sole son Giacomo  
Deceased, fatuous and doting, ere his Sire,"  
The townsfolk rubbed their eyes, could but admire  
Which of Sofia's five he meant. The chaps  
Of his dead hope were tardy to collapse,  
Obliterated not the beautiful  
Distinctive features at a crash—scarce dull  
Next year, as Azzo, Boniface withdrew  
Each to his stronghold ; then (securely too  
Ecelin at Campese slept—close by  
Who likes may see him in Solagna lie

With cushioned head and gloved hand to denote  
The Cavalier he was)—then his heart smote  
Young Ecelin, conceive! Long since adult,  
And, save Vicenza's business, what result  
In blood and blaze? so hard 'twas intercept  
Sordello till Sordello's option! Stept  
Its lord on Lombardy—for in the nick  
Of time when he at last and Alberic  
Closed with Taurello, came precisely news  
That in Verona half the souls refuse  
Allegiance to the Marquis and the Count—  
Have cast them from a throne they bid him mount,  
Their Podestà, thro' his ancestral worth :  
Ecelin flew there, and the town henceforth  
Was wholly his—Taurello sinking back  
From temporary station to a track  
That suited : news received of this acquist,  
Friedrich did come to Lombardy—who missed  
Taurello? Yet another year—they took  
Vicenza, left the Marquis scarce a nook  
For refuge, and, when hundreds two or three  
After conspired to call themselves “the Free,”  
Opposing Alberic, these Bassanese,  
(Without Sordello!)—Ecelin at ease

Slaughtered them so observably that oft  
A little Salinguerra looked with soft  
Blue eyes up, asked his sire the proper age  
To get appointed his proud uncle's page :  
More years passed, and that sire was dwindled down  
To a mere showy turbulent soldier, grown  
Better through age, his parts still in repute,  
Subtle—how else ?—but hardly so astute  
As his contemporaneous friends professed—  
Undoubtedly a brawler—for the rest,  
Known by each neighbour, so allowed for, let  
Keep his incorrigible ways, nor fret  
Men who had missed their boyhood's bugbear—trap  
The ostrich, suffer our bald osprey flap  
A battered pinion—was the word. In fine,  
One flap too much and Venice's marine  
Was meddled with ; no overlooking that !  
We captured him in his Ferrara, fat  
And florid at a banquet, more by fraud  
Than force, to speak the truth—there 's slender laud  
Ascribed you for assisting eighty years  
To pull his death on such a man—fate shears  
The life-cord prompt enough whose last fine threads  
You fritter : so, presiding his board-head,

A great smile your assurance all went well  
With Friedrich (as if he were like to tell!)  
In rushed (a plan contrived before) our friends,  
Made some pretence at fighting, just amends  
For the shame done his eighty years—apart  
The principle, none found it in his heart  
To be much angry with Taurello—gained  
Our galleys with the prize, and what remained  
But carry him to Venice for a show?  
—Set him, as 'twere, down gently—free to go  
His gait, inspect our square, pretend observe  
The swallows soaring their eternal curve  
'Twixt Theodore and Mark, if citizens  
Gathered importunately, fives and tens,  
To point their children the Magnifico,  
All but a monarch once in firm-land, go  
His gait among us now—it took, indeed,  
Fully this Ecelin to supersede  
That man, remarked the seniors. Singular  
Sordello's inability to bar  
Rivals the stage, that evening, mainly brought  
About by his strange disbelief that aught  
Was to be done, should fairly thrust the Twain  
Under Taurello's tutelage, that, brain



And heart and hand, he forthwith in one rod  
Indissolubly bound to baffle God  
Who loves the world—should thus allow the thin  
Grey wizened dwarfish devil Ecelin,  
And massy-muscled big-boned Alberic  
(Mere man, alas) to put his problem quick  
To demonstration—prove wherever's will  
To do, there's plenty to be done, or ill  
Or good : anointed, then, to rend and rip—  
Kings of the gag and flesh-hook, screw and whip,  
They plagued the world : a touch of Hildebrand  
(So far from obsolete !) made Lombards band  
Together, cross their coats as for Christ's cause,  
And saving Milan win the world's applause.  
Ecelin perished : and I think grass grew  
Never so pleasant as in Valley Rù  
By San Zenon where Alberic in turn  
Saw his exasperated captors burn  
Seven children with their mother, and, regaled  
So far, tied on to a wild horse, was traile  
To death through raunce and bramble-bush : I take  
God's part and testify that mid the brake  
Wild o'er his castle on Zenone's knoll  
You hear its one tower left, a belfry, toll—

Cherups the contumacious grasshopper,  
Rustles the lizard and the cushats chirre  
Above the ravage: there, at deep of day  
A week since, heard I the old Canon say  
He saw with his own eyes a barrow burst  
And Alberic's huge skeleton unheard  
Five years ago, no more: he added, June's  
A month for carding off our first cocoons  
The silkworms fabricate—a double news,  
Nor he nor I could tell the worthier. Choose!

And Naddo gone, all's gone; not Eglamor!  
Believe I knew the face I waited for,  
A guest my spirit of the golden courts:  
Oh strange to see how, despite ill-reports,  
Disuse, some wear of years, that face retained  
Its joyous look of love! Suns waxed and waned,  
And still my spirit held an upward flight,  
Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light  
More and more gorgeous—ever that face there  
The last admitted! crossed, too, with some care  
As perfect triumph were not sure for all,  
But on a few enduring damp must fall,  
A transient struggle, haply a painful sense  
Of the inferior nature's clinging—whence

Slight starting tears easily wiped away,  
Fine jealousies soon stifled in the play  
Of irrepressible admiration—not  
Aspiring, all considered, to their lot  
Who ever, just as they prepare ascend  
Spiral on spiral, wish thee well, impend  
Thy frank delight at their exclusive track,  
That upturned fervid face and hair put back !

Is there no more to say ? He of the rhymes—  
Many a tale of this retreat betimes  
Was born : Sordello die at once for men ?  
The Chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen  
Relating how a Prince Visconti saved  
Mantua and elsewhere notably behaved—  
Who thus by fortune's ordering events  
Passed with posterity to all intents  
For just the God he never could become :  
As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb  
In praise of him : while what he should have been,  
Could be, and was not—the one step too mean  
For him to take, we suffer at this day  
Because of ; Ecelin had pushed away  
Its chance ere Dante could arrive to take  
That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake :

He did much—but Sordello's step was gone.  
Thus had Sordello ta'en that step alone,  
Apollo had been compassed—'twas a fit  
He wished should go to him, not he to it  
—As one content to merely be supposed  
Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed  
Really at home—and who was chiefly glad  
To have achieved the few real deeds he had  
Because that way assured they were not worth  
Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth—  
A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes  
Never itself, itself—had he embraced  
Our cause then, Men had plucked Hesperian fruit  
And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot  
All he was anxious to appear but scarce  
Solicitous to be : a sorry farce  
Such life is after all—cannot I say  
He lived for some one better thing ? this way—  
Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill  
By sparkling Asolo, in mist and chill,  
Morning just up, higher and higher runs  
A child barefoot and rosy—See ! the sun's  
On the square castle's inner-court's green wall  
—Like the chine of some fossil animal

Half turned to earth and flowers ; and thro' the haze  
(Save where some slender patches of grey maize)  
Are to be overleaped) that boy has crost  
The whole hill-side of dew and powder-frost  
Matting the balm and mountain camomile :  
Up and up goes he, singing all the while  
Some unintelligible words to beat  
The lark, God's poet, swooning at his feet  
So worsted is he at the few fine locks  
Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks  
Sunblanched the livelong summer.—All that's left  
Of the Goito lay ! And thus bereft,  
Sleep and forget, Sordello . . . in effect  
He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect  
Not utterly companionless ; but, friends,  
Wake up ; the ghost's gone, and the story ends  
I'd fain hope, sweetly—seeing, peri or ghoul,  
That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,  
Evil or good, judicious authors think,  
According as they vanish in a stink  
Or in a perfume : friends be frank : ye snuff  
Civet, I warrant : really ? Like enough—  
Merely the savour's rareness—any nose  
May ravage with impunity a rose—

Rifle a musk-pod and 'twill ache like yours :  
I'd tell you that same pungency ensures  
An after-gust—but that were overbold :  
Who would has heard Sordello's story told.

THE END.

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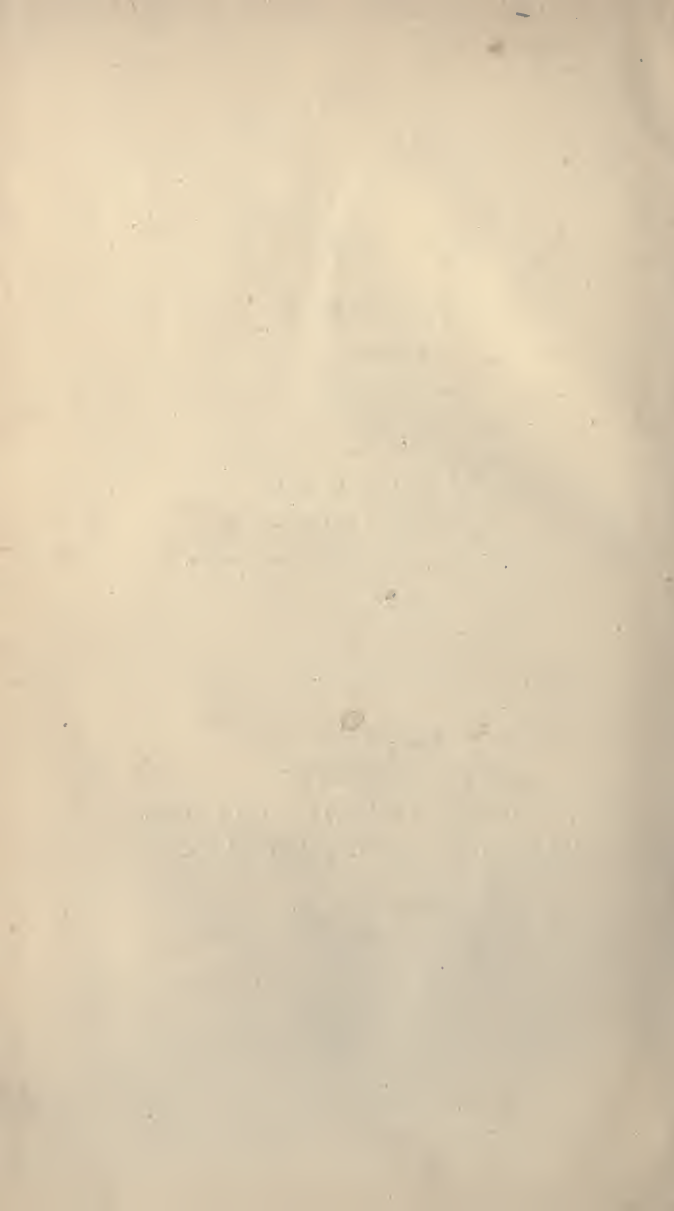
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